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THIS IS MY INTRODUCTION: SHORT AND SWEET
WELL, I WOULD NOT CALL IT SWEET BUT IT'S FOR SURE.

KANTOROWITZ, MOISHE

CHARLOTTE: This is Moishe Kantorowitz's introduction ... Remember his post war section is first, Leah Zazulyer

It was my destiny to have been born and lived in the most eventful, interesting, and yet in the most brutal and savage century in human history. Much more so in the history of my people, the Jewish people. I have seen in my time my people at the edge of the abyss as they were being thrown daily down the bottomless pit by the tens of thousands. I have seen the destruction of an entire third of my people, six million in all, men, women, and children. The destruction of the source and cradle of Hebrew and Yiddish literature from which countless generations drew their aspiration and boundless hope. The destruction of almost two thousand years of Jewish creative life in Europe, of which the damage and immensity of that horror cannot be comprehended.

It was also my destiny and privilege to witness what I consider to be the greatest event of the past twentieth century, namely; the transformation of the remnants of the European Jewry from Holocaust victims to a liberated people returning to their rightful homeland after two thousand years of exile and untold persecution.

The calamity and disaster that befell the Jews of Europe from the mid thirties to the mid forties of the twentieth century had annihilated almost all of continental European Jewry including my entire family, among them my father and mother, my only brother, and all my three sisters, my paternal grandparents, six uncles, five aunts and all their children, a total of fifty one souls.

As I am the sole survivor of my entire family that I had in Europe, it is my wish that they should be remembered and that their memory shall be perpetuated so that their lives, their suffering, and their horribly agonizing untimely deaths should not be forgotten with my passing.

It is also my wish to leave on paper my personal experience of that era as well as the experience I shared with my dear ones. For deep in my heart I believe that my life was spared in order to bear witness to the tragedy that befell my people during the darkest era in Jewish history.

I would also like to put down on paper the names of my towns people that I still remember. Among them my child hood friends, neighbors, teachers, volunteer social-workers, rabbi, saxtons, "Baal-Tefials" (a person who leads in prayer), cantors, the so called pious and the secular, the scholars and the ignoramuses, the rational and the demented, the so called "rich" and the poor. All those that made up an ordinary shtetl before the catastrophe and were slaughtered without leaving behind any remnant. Not a single person to remember them, to mention their names, to shed a tear over their mass graves

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or mounds of ashes, as those mass graves and mounds of ashes are the only witnesses, the only testimony to them ever having walked on this earth.

It is my hope that my children and theirs will read it, will get acquainted through the written word with family they never knew, get an idea of what their ancestors' world was like. Maybe they will exhale a sigh on my behalf and light a candle on the anniversary of their martyrdom.

Hopefully there will come a time when people of good will, among all nations, will join together wherever they are at whatever time to remember the millions of innocent martyrs and be inspired to commit themselves to dedicate their time and effort to the struggle of equality and tolerance among all races and religions and the betterment of all humanity.

DEAR [illegible],

PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU [illegible] OF, BUT THE [illegible]

[illegible]

To the best of my ability I'll try to look back into the farthest corners of my memory to recall the earliest years of my childhood.

As unbelievable as it sounds, I recall I wasn't much more than two years old when we lived, that is my parents, my sister Sheva and I in my grandparent's, my mother's parent's, Laizer-Bear and Freida-Leah Auerbuch's house on Ostrowiecka street. A long low lying house built from the standard 6 by 12 inch thick timber of which the houses in Shershev were built.

The wooden floor, because of the age of the house was almost lying on the ground. The floors of the bedrooms, however, were higher than in the rest of the house, thus forming an elevation at the entrance to the bedrooms of some half a dozen inches.

I can see myself as a child of no more than two years old sitting on that elevation, with my feet resting on the lower part of the floor singing a children's song about a little room containing a hammer, a metal bowl and other things.

I can still hear the melody of a couple lullabies and remember some of the words, that my mother sang to me putting me to bed.

The first one was a story of a maiden who was forced to marry the king and leave her true love behind.The song was a sad one and more so the melody, which always succeeded in making me sad. The other song was about a young maiden in whose garden was a well to which her lover used to come every evening to get his fill of the cool quenching drink. As a child I took it literally to mean as the cool water.

My mother used to sing to me in Yiddish, it was some years later that I learned that it was a translation from Hebrew, written by the great Hebrew poet Bialik and is known in Hebrew literature under the name "Yesh-Le-Gan".Still later I realized that the poet didn't refer to the cool water literally.

I also remember a morning before Pesach(passover.) The garden behind the kitchen window looks neglected. The snow has recently melted exposing the unkept garden-beds left from the previous fall and the strewn around potato stems. It is to early yet to plow. My grandfather(mother's father) Laizer-Bear put down a large copper boiler on the ground in the middle of the garden, making sure it's not close to the house. Elevates the boiler with the help of three stones placed underneath. Carrying two pails at a time he makes a couple of trips to the well filling up the boiler with water. He starts a fire under the boiler and shoves the end of a long metal rod into the fire.

After a long while the water in the boiler starts to bubble. At the same time the end of the metal rod in the fire becomes flaming red. My grandfather with the help of a rug picks up the cooler end of the rod sticking the red hot other end of the rod into the boiler.The water explodes with a geyser of hissing steam and bubbles furiously.

By then there is a circle of neighbours around, each with a bundle of cutlery in their hands, tied together on the same cord, but each utensil separate, a couple of inches apart, like a long gigantic jewels string.

My grandfather takes from each of them a string at a time dipping it three times in the boiling water. After the cutlery comes all sorts of other dishes.

Several years past before I learned that my grandfather was making kosher for passover(designated as clean and proper by Jewish dietary law) our and the neighbours cutlery and dishes for Pesach(passover.)

As far as I remember my grandparents(my mothers parents) lived already by then in their other house almost across the street in the house of my mother's grandfather Nathen-Shepsl Goldfarb, after whom I am named. (As one of my two middle names is Nathen, the other is Aaron.)

Because my father was a war invalid, the Polish government in 1924 gave him a " concession" . That is, a permit to run a restaurant in which alcoholic drinks could be served as well a retail sale of unopened bottles of alcoholic drinks.

The sale of liquor was under strict government supervision in Poland and whoever had such a permit was assured a reasonable livelihood. Every district had an allocated number of such permits and affixed places, so that one had to accept the permit in the assigned place. My father received his permit valid for a place called "Wierchy" in the district of Volinia, a large village between the towns of Kowel and Kamien-Koszyrsk. The village existed mainly from employment in the two large sawmills there. Thanks to those sawmills many farmers from the surrounding villages found employment in the off season months.

My father therefore had to move to that village Wierchy. As there was only a handful of Jewish families in that village, my mother preferred to remain with me and my by one and a half years older sister Sheva in Shershev and live in my grandparents, my mother's parents house which was almost across the street from where we lived.

The house in which my grandparents lived did not differ much from the one we lived in, just a bit smaller. Behind the house was a shed in which my grandparents kept firewood for the winter, behind it was a stable which served as a storage place for all kinds of odds and ends. Why it was called a stable I never knew, for my great-grandfather was a tailor by trade and I doubt if he ever had a horse, unless a cow.

That house liked the one we lived in, stood back from the street some 20 meters and the space between the house and the street was taken up by a well looked after garden, at which end near the road grew two big maple trees whose leaves in the fall the neighbours used to collect, using them to put under the loaves of bread while they were being baked.

A much larger garden extended behind the house which had a large pear tree at it's left side.

I was three years old when we moved in with my grandparents, my mother's parents. As they had no more use for the house we used to live in, my grandparents sold it.

Few months later I got sick with pneumonia. My grandparent's house was an old house that was built in a time when people were more concerned with preserving heat than overhead space, nor was there much concern or belief in the theory of fresh air. As a result there wasn't much air for a three and a half year old boy with a bad case of pneumonia to breathe, and I had just about stopped.

In desperation my mother sent for her only brother still in Shershev(the other two left for the U.S. before the first world war)my uncle Shloime(Solomon) Auerbuch. He, having come in, immediately noticed the closed air in the house, opening a window and picking me up he took me over to the opened window and fresh air.

His action, at least according to my mother saved my life, for I began to breathe regularly and freely.

That very day a doctor was brought in from the neighbouring town, Pruzany, her name was Ola Goldfeine and she immediately suggested that I should be moved to a larger and roomier place.

My mother then decided to move to my other grandparents, my father's parents, grandparents Yaakov-Kopl and Chinkah Kantorowicz.

My grandfather Kopl as he was usually called was the mayor of the Shtetl, a very respectable member of the community of Shershev and vicinity. Of medium height, broad shouldered with a little protruding stomach, a rosy healthy looking face and a red beard, which despite his age showed very few gray hair.

My grandmother Chinkah was a tall slim woman who had absolute authority in the house. Even my grandfather Kopl, accustomed to giving orders used to submit to all my grandmothers decisions. At least that is how it seemed to me as a child.

My grandparents from my fathers side were part of the few rich members of the community. A big house on the main street called "Mostowa" (bridge street) because of the bridge crossing the street. Indeed, only four houses down the street was that wooden bridge over the river. Behind the house was a building constructed from the same heavy six inch thick timber that the houses were built of. That building served all kinds of purposes at given times. During the first world war my grandfather kept there horses, a wagon and certain farm machinery. As I found out later my grandfather used to farm during the first world war, having to feed a wife and nine children. Those four years were very lean years in our parts of the world. However my grandparents from my fathers side faired much better than those of my mother side, because of the grown-up children like my father and his older brother Shevach, who were both of military age. My father's older brother never returned home after the first world war, buried somewhere in the vast expansions of Russia. My grandparent's other children, although teenagers, could already put in a days work and contribute to the feeding and the survival of the younger members, and that is what they did.

Through all those fifty or more years my grandfather had a hardware store which gave him a comfortable living. For my time that building behind the house served not only as a wood shed but more importantly as a warehouse for the store.

We took up three rooms in my grandparent's house, but my mother had to share the kitchen with my grandmother. As the house was intended to be a single family house.

Sure enough, I soon got better. Too many memories from the next two years did not remain with me. I will mention only some; close to a year after we moved in there, a fire broke out on the other side of the river which was no more than 100 metres from where we lived.

There was a volunteer fire brigade in Shershev that consisted of a couple dozen men with little training and even less equipment. This volunteer group seemed unable to bring the fire under control, and the fire spread, engulfing the neighboring houses reaching the river bank. There was a danger that the fire could cross the few metre wide river, thus putting the entire main street including my grandparent's house in danger.

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My mother got a wagon-drayer(wagon owner) who come with his wagon, loading it up as high as humanly possible, we set out to our other grandparent's, my mother's parents, who lived a good distance from there. I remember that my maternal grandfather came for me in person, not letting me climb on the wagon he carried me in his arms, a distance of well over a kilometre. He was in his early seventies, looked and acted like all men of his age at that time, that is to say, much older then a man in his early seventies now a days.

I recall as while he was carrying me, I looked up to the sky and noticed that it was covered with flying sparks and small cinders that were continuously floating slowly to the ground and showering the houses we were just leaving behind.

The fire was eventually put out with the help of the fire brigade from the neighbouring town Pruzany that came with a fire truck and motorized pumps which Shershev didn't have.

The next morning we returned back, to find that half a dozen houses went up in flames last night but the fire didn't cross the river. My mother took us two, that is my sister Sheva and me, to look at the devastation and the still glowing cinders.

Another memory; almost across my grandfather's house a stranger to us all opened a barber shop. It was a man from deep Poland, big bodied with to me a very strange(Polish-Yiddish) accent, by the name of Shmulevitch. He owned a small caliber rifle. Every morning after opening his shop he used to come out with his rifle, lining up a row of bottles or other discarded objects on a fence he used to shot them down.

Every time he used to do it, which used to be every sunny morning, a group of idlers used to gather around to look at the stranger who indulges in such a none Jewish sport.

The end was that the man couldn't make a living in Shershev and a couple of years later he moved away.

We lived in our paternal grandparents house to the end of 1928, we, that is my mother, my sister Sheva, and I. My father lived all that time in the village of Wierchy, where he ran his restaurant. There he rented the bigger part of a local Jewish owned home which served as living quarters for my father, liquor retail and restaurant.

Already in summer 1927 we made our first trip there, so we could spend some time together. On holidays our father used to come to Shershev.

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One such trip to Wierchy, stayed with me up to now, it could be because it might have been the first.

In order to get there one had to use several means of transportation. From Shershev, one had to get to the next town, the district town of Pruzany, by horse and buggy 18 kilometres, a three hours ride, from Pruzany to get to the railway station Oranczyce-Linovo, a distance of 12 kilometres by a narrow gauge train. From there by regular train to Braest-Litowsk, change trains to Kovel.

There in Kovel, for the first time in my life, I saw what the people there called an omnibus. It looked like a little bus with no motor, pulled by a team of 4 horses. The wheels were made of wood framed in a metal railing just like the farmers' wagons. On one of our trips to Wierchy, one of the wheels broke and thanks to a sturdy wire in one of our suitcases the driver managed to continue the trip.

Arriving in Wierchy, we moved in with our father in his cramped quarters. I still remember as my father took me to one of the sawmills to show me the huge steam engine. It was at a time when my father still held me by my hand. There in the noisy engine room one of the attendants climbed up the ladder and pressed the steam whistle. It frightened me immensely and I would have run out had my father not held me by my hand. I can still see the man and his wife my father rented the house from, their 2 sons, ages 10 and 12, as in that summer afternoon, they are plucking the feathers from the live geese, each is holding a goose by its neck with one hand, and with the other is plucking the feathers. Their honking could be heard far and wide.

I still remember the Jewish "Poretz" (large estate owner), a rarity in Poland as Jews were not permitted to own land. Only those Jews that owned land before the first World War under the Czar who gave such permission to a handful of privilaged Jews were permitted.

His estate was close to the village and he used to ride into the village on horseback. A tall man in riding boots and breeches with a rifle over his shoulder. Once he rode into our restaurant sitting on his horse. He always had a pocketful of a particular kind of candy which he never failed to give me on his visit to us for a chat with my father, which was very often. He even tried to have a conversation with me in Polish and Russian, which at that age I spoke neither.

As I mentioned earlier, there were 2 large sawmills in Wierchy, the main industry and employer in the area, which employed at times several hundred people, including the farmers from the surrounding

villages that used to haul the logs to the mill. They used to get paid once a month. The workers in need of money before payday, used to get from the owners a hand written note stating that the note is worth the indicated amount to the bearer. This note used to be accepted as indicated by the few local stores as currency, and cashed in at the end of the month in the mills' office. The workers, having cashed in their notes and in possession of real cash had to go to celebrate the event drinking away a fair part of their pay. Many drinking to intoxication and had to be driven home by their buddies. A drinking habit innate in many gentiles in that part of the world. The handful of Jewish small store keepers including my father made a living from the non-Jewish population that was at that time fully employed as were the Jewish tradesman and artisans.

I still remember the Jewish blacksmith and his assistant, a young man with extraordinary strength, as a circle of gentiles used to gather around to admire the young Jewish strong man. He used to pick out the biggest and heaviest man around, lift him over his head and throw him several metres away.

In between our trip to Wierchy, we used to go for a summer vacation to a place called "Domaczewo." This was a summer resort near the river Bug. Some 40 kilometres south of Breast-Litowsk. A Jewish shtetl whose inhabitants main source of subsistence was the renting out rooms and cottages to vacationers, that used to come to spend the week, month, or summer there and to enjoy the fresh air, the walk in the forest, and the smell of its pine trees.

I can still see in my mind the shtetl and Jewish homes, a couple rows of wooden houses, built on a sandy terrain, the cobblestone streets where the vacationers walked in the late summer afternoon. I remember peeking in the open doors and windows of the Jewish homes in which I, as an inquisitive child used to look in and at times watch as the local Jews the upper part of their bodies naked, except for the "Arbah-Kanfess" (a undergarment worn by Orthodox Jews with tassels on its four corners), working in the sweltering and suffocating mid day heat, making paper bags for grocery stores to supplement their income.

The main attraction however was the surrounding pine forest where the vacationers use to spend most of their time. Even there I can see the local baker with a large baking pan resting with one side on his middle, suspended by a cord over his neck, loaded with cookies and other sweet baked stuff, walking around the groups of vacationers especially where there were children around, and yelling; "cheese cake, butter cake preserve cake".

I used to find the pronunciation of his Brest-litowsk Yiddish intriguing, for it was very different then ours. That poor man used to spend most of his nights baking in order to be out in the morning with his freshly baked cakes.

Getting to Domaczewo was no easy matter. To begin with there was the inevitable trip from Shershev to Pruzany, a distance of eighteen kilometres that took three hours by horse and buggy. From Pruzany to the station Oranczyce-Linovo by small gage train and from there to Brest-Litowsk by regular train. There, changing trains for Drohyczin Lubelski and get of in Domaczewo.

Let us also keep in mind that by going there my mother had to rent a room or two, she had to do her own baking and cooking, there were no dishes available neither to buy nor to rent, so half a household of dishes, utensils, clothing and underwear had to travel with us.

How my mother managed to bring all the above and us two small children along on such a long and tiresome trip I never understood.

My father too used to come out to Domaczevo to spend with us a few days.

In those very early years of my life I used to spend a lot of my time at my maternal grandparents Auerbuch and often did sleep over. They used to live by themselves, a modest and peaceful way of life. My grandfather dividing his time between their children and grandchildren on one hand and his synagogue, called the "Rabbis Synagogue", in which he was the "Gabby" (Trustee) on the other.

It was a few years later, I got a bit older and they were already gone that I realized how much they loved us and how much I missed them.

Their love and family devotion was boundless, so characteristic, so natural, so innate in the Auerbuch side of our family.

From the days of living with our paternal grandparents, I recall my father's two youngest brother's living there with their parents, my grandparents. The older one, Hershel, and the younger one, Eliyouh, or Eli as he was called. Eli was then a student attending the Hebrew gymnasium(high school) in Pruzany. He used to come home every Friday afternoon and returned Saturday night to attend classes on Sunday. He used to come home also on all other Jewish holidays and vacation time.

I see them with pliers in hands splitting old auto tires. There were no autos or any motorized vehicle in Shershev then and I don't know where my grandfather used to buy them. The tires were so thick that they had to be split in half and then given to specialized artisans who used to make them into a sort of shoes held together with rivets and worn on cloth wrapped feet with long leather strapps.Those were sturdy foot wear that could last for years and affordable to the local farmers. My grandfather used to sell them in his store. The bulk of the business in my grandfather's hardware store consisted of selling the metal parts needed in making wagons, like axles, metal sleeves forming the center of the wheel, the steering mechanism rails to go around the wheels and a full line of hardware articles.

While speaking about hardware stores, I will mention that my father's brother Reuben, "Ruva", as he was called, had a hardware store too, one of three hardware stores in Shtetl. The third belonging to Joshua(Youshuah)Pinsky. All the three stores were within 30 metres of each other.

The winter 1927-28 was a difficult one, enough for me to remember as I got up and looked across the street where Hertzke Fishelles house was supposed to be and all I could see was a smoking chimney sticking out of a mountain of snow.

Some time later a few neighbours shoveled away the snow from that door so that the residents could get out.

In early spring 1928 we moved into a rented house owned by Yudel(Yehuda) and Reizl Zubatzky, a big and fairly new house. She kept two rooms for herself and for her son Shlomo two years older than I and her twins, two three year old girls. Her husband was away, being employed as a forest watchman in Volynia, coming home rarely.

With that early spring I turned five years old, time for a Jewish boy to start "Heder".(Traditional Jewish religious school.) There were a few " Melamedim"(teachers of children in Heder) in Shershev.

My mother with the help of her father, my grandfather Laizer-Bear, decided on a Melamed by the name of "Kepele Potchinker". He

lived with his wife in one of the alleys that run off the main street "Mostowa" towards the swamps that surrounded a good part of the Shtetl. The little street or alley in which he lived was a swamp too and as far as I can remember it was never dry even in the hot summer days.

The Melamed(teacher) was a tall man with a long beard and his attitude towards his little charges was grandfatherly.

The night before my first day in Heder my mother took me to her parents to sleep over. I could never understand why that particular night, before starting Heder, one of the most important days in a Jewish boys life, my mother wanted me to spend with her parents.

The next morning my mother was there bright and early, after breakfast my mother took me by my left hand letting her father hold my right hand. Holding hands the three of us walked out the kitchen into the hallway and to the outside door, they both stopped at the door telling me to step over the threshold with my right foot first, according to Jewish custom a remedy and omen of good luck and success.

And so we stepped across the threshold as they kept on blessing me with every blessing they could think of. I remember wondering what it is like going to Heder, but I felt safe holding on to the hands of the two people I loved and trusted most in the world who were now walking on either side of me like two guardian angels.

Thus I started the first day of my Jewish education.

The system in attending a Heder was that one signed up the child for a "zmann"(a six month period) with the rabbe(teacher.) There were rabbes that took on only beginners. Others kept their students for a couple of years, accepting new ones yearly, thus creating classes, or grades.

Mine took on beginners, letting them go after six months and starting a new group.

My grandfather Laizer-Bear made me a little wooden lantern with little glass panes on all sides, one side served as a door through which the rabbe used to light for me the candle before going home, so I could find my way in the dark muddy alley.

I started by learning to recognize the Hebrew letters and from there I graduated to reading slowly from a Sidder(prayer book.)

The six months went by and my mother and grandfather came to take me home, just as they did the first day they brought me there.

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I guess the rabbe(teacher) wanted to show them that he earned his pay, his tuition, so he put me down at the head of the table, opening the sidder(prayer book) at random and told me to read.

My mother and grandfather on either side of me but a little to the back, and like the first day six months ago my mother on my left side and my grandfather on the right.

I kept on reading to the bottom of the page, of course not understanding a word. As soon as I finished a handful of change began to fall down on the table, some remaining on it, others rolling in all directions and off the table.

I turned around asking my grandfather what it meant, his answer was that angels from heaven threw it down, a reward for my being a good student. I could have sworn that I noticed my grandfather's hand disappear behind my back as I looked up while the coins were falling.

Having so much trust in and love for my grandfather it took some of my early years before submitting fully to my original impression.

That summer of 1928 I slept many nights at my grandparents Auerbuch. There wasn't much to do in the evenings with them. From somewhere my grandfather got some exercise books that were lined and written all over with a silvery ink in beautiful calligraphy. The writing was in Latin letters but I don't know in what language.

My grandfather gave me a pencil and told me to follow with it the silvery writing. Being left handed I took the pencil with my left hand which was unacceptable in those days. It took me a long long time to get used to holding a pencil in my right hand. The result is that despite the fact that I am today fully left handed I write with my right hand.

Ah, those long gone evenings with my grandparents Auerbuch, the little house, the low lying ceiling, the room poorly lit by the kerosene lamp that stood on the table to make reading and writing easier, the attention they gave me and above all their love.

Besides her parents, my mother had in Shershev her oldest brother Shloime(Solomon) some dozen years older than her. He was married to Esther Liba (nee Winograd). They, that is my uncle and his wife, had their two oldest sons, Jakob(Jack) and David, living in the U.S.A. They left Shershev in the early twenties.

It was the wish of almost every Jew and non-Jew in eastern and central Europe to emigrate to the U.S., particularly the Jews. For if the non-Jews wanted it for economic reasons, the Jews had another one

besides the economic, and just as valid; to get away from the centuries old persecution and pogroms.

I don't think that the U.S. has ever had any greater patriots than the Jews of eastern Europe, and to think that they let them down so heartlessly to perish in the Holocaust.

To have two sons in the U.S. it meant a foot in the door, and indeed, the oldest son Jacob(Jack) sent papers for his father, my uncle, to come to America.

My mother was very close to her brother who was the oldest child to my grandparents, by the same token her oldest brother, who assumed his function as such by being her adviser, counsel and confidant.

My mother had two more brothers in America, by then one of them, Leo (Lippa), has passed away at a young age, leaving a wife, Rebecca, and a young son, Irving. The other brother in America, Pesah,(Philip) was living in New York with his wife Esther. But my mother hardly knew them as they left Shershev as young men while my mother, the youngest, was just a child.

So the bond between my mother and her brother Shloime(Solomon) was very strong. We all knew that my uncle is expecting an entry Visa to the States, but it only struck home when he got his papers and began to get ready to leave.

When ever I think of those events and go back to those years I can't help but wonder what it was like for the departing person. To leave dear ones and loved ones behind, a place of birth where one grew up, all the friends and acquaintances, in fact for most of them, their entire world, for their world did not extend much beyond the perimetres of the shtetl. It was there where they were born and could trace their ancestry generations back, lo, centuries back, and because of the immense at that time world that looked so forbidding the small town or village denizen was also frightened to set out across oceans to a distant land, strangers among strangers without a penny in the pocket and without a language.

What about the family members one left behind? Parents, brothers, sisters. Others left behind wives and children. True, family heads left with the hope and intention to send papers for wives and children as soon as it is legally and financially possible. I'm not referring to my uncle, for he was going to establish sons there, so to speak, and did not have to worry about passage expenses having left with his wife, a house which would, and did, cover traveling expenses for the rest of the family two years

later, as well as a running store which was as good as any on Shershevian scale.

But what about my grandparents, my uncles parents who were then already in the early seventies? What chance did they have to see their son again? They have seen their other two sons leave more than three decades earlier, to see the last and only son left in Shershev go, had to be traumatic.

Leaving for the states my uncle left behind his wife Esther-Liba and children. The youngest being Eliyau(Eli) ten months my junior. The others from the oldest was Chvolkah(Hellen), Avreml(Abraham), Rose, Lipa(Leon), Elchonon(Herald) and of course the youngest Eliyau(Eli). At the time of my uncles departure they were all still at school accept the two oldest ones.

My uncle's idea was of course the same as any married man's who left at that time for the states, that is to receive the first papers after two years of residence and to send for the rest of the family, which he had done thus saving his entire family from the fate that befell European Jewry.

And my mother who practically knew only this one brother all her life and was tied to him with a thousand knots, had to part with him, what had turned out to be for ever. She remained alone of the Auerbach family taking on the burden and responsibility to look after an old father and mother.

Since the day of my uncles departure, there wasn't a day that my mother didn't mention his name at least once. She used to wait for his letters as eagerly as a devoted Jew for the Messiah, hoping that it will bring the "good news" meaning that his older daughter Chvolke(Ellen) became betrothed.

It seems that that year was a difficult and traumatic one for my mother, that I, then a five year old child, would still remember it now, almost seventy years later.

There were other less world shattering events that took place in Shershev, for example; the introduction of the first autobus in Shtetl, that was bought in partnership by a few local merchants to commute between Shershev and Pruzany, eighteen kilometres away. That bus used to be parked overnight in my uncle Shloime's shed that had high and wide enough doors for the bus to pass.

I can still see the name the bus was given by the owners; large letter spelling "Warszawianka" on either of it's sides. It would

cut down on travel time between Shershev and Pruzany from three hours by horse and buggy to half an hour by bus.

There was of course the small mater of fare which was a whole zloty by bus against half a zloty by horse and buggy. As far as the price goes, I like to inform the reader that a zloty represented a days pay for an unskilled laborer.

Behind my uncles house was a large garden and I recall how in late autumn a hole was dug in the ground in which potatoes were heaped, covered with straw and the straw covered with a thick layer of earth. The potatoes were left there for over the winter. In early spring they were dug up, as a rule in good condition to be eaten until the new crop was ready to be harvested in the fall.

This system of preserving potatoes over winter was wide spread in eastern Europe. However it happened sometimes that the potatoes froze or rotted, to the disappointment and privation of the owners.

I see myself in my uncle Shloime's house where I used to be a frequent visitor. How lively that house was, always full with young people, not only the members of the family but their numerous friends. All my uncles children except for the youngest one were between the ages of ten and twenty, each in a different class and each with his or her classmates. That house could have easily been taken at times for a small school or a youth club.

I can still see my cousin Abe(Abraham) play the violin and hear my mother praising his talent and extol his virtues regarding his scholastic abilities.

Years later, many years later, when we met as adults, I realized how much fate has wronged him. I have no doubt that would he have had a chance to get a higher formal education he would have attained fame and recognition. Never the less despite those deprivations he managed to amass enough knowledge to put many academics to shame.

My uncles other children too were keen and studious youngsters and it seemed that they had a bright future, yet when they reached these shores it did not turn out to be the "America" it meant to be.

That summer my mother hinted that my father is looking for a way to came home, that is to transfer his license to Shershev, which was more complicated than it seemed. At about the same time a decision was made, I would assume, more by my mother than by my grandfather, to enroll me in a more advanced and progressive heder. There was one in Shershev run by "Yaakov-Berl" Eisenstein. A man of about forty,

corpulent in appearance, self educated, who got his early education and experience as teacher from his late father the "Melamed"(teacher of children in Heder)who was known in Shtetl by the name of "Chaim the Melamed".

That Yaakov-Berl run a Heder of some 20-25 boys of different ages and levels. His method of teaching was considered modern in local terms. Not only did he teach the Pentateuch, Bible and Mishnah(the collection of post-biblical laws and rabbinical discussions), but even Gemara(part of the Talmud which comments on the Mishnah).He even taught Hebrew as a living language, which was something new in Shtetl, in direct competition with the Hebrew school that was established in 1925 and numbered some 125 students during the 1930's.

Besides the above qualities this Yaakov-Berl had others too, he was a good violinist. In the warm summer evenings passers by use to stop to listen to the sweet melodies pouring out the open windows of his living room.

For good measure he was also a carpenter who made all the furniture in his house, a shoemaker who used to make shoes for his entire family and also a violin maker which were the highest priced in Shershev. His oldest son Leizer(Lazar) was my age and years later was my classmate in the Polish public school.

A decision was made for me to enroll right after the holidays, that is Rosh Hashana(the Jewish new year),Yom Kippur(the day of atonement) and Sukkot(the feast of tabernacles).

My father came to spend with us those holidays. He took me with him to the synagogue which was quite a walk, passing by three others on the way.

For some reason I remember the day of atonement best. The eve of that day my father and I went for "Mincha"(the midday prayer)distributing alms all around the entrance of the synagogue. I recall the long evening prayer, the floor of the synagogue covered with hay as most of the worshipers wore no shoes inside and the hundreds of large lit candles all around gave the synagogue an air of solemn mystic.

How mysterious, how awe-inspiring, yet how bewailing, how lamenting and heart-renting those prayers were.

At the age of five I did not understand the meaning of the words in the prayers but the dignity of the moment was enough to instill in me and in all the children, a feeling of respect and solemnety.

In the morning all the seats of the synagogue were taken, there wasn't enough room for all the children to sit down, besides, how long can one expect a child to sit? So we used to run around.

My father was a member of the same Shul(synagogue) as my maternal grandfather, called the rabbi's synagogue.The reason being is that the rabbi lived nearby and attended services there. My maternal grandfather Laizer-Bear was the Gabbi(head, warden of the synagogue).

According to Jewish tradition one should not wear leather footwear in the synagogue on the high holidays, however, only the older members adhered to this tradition among them my grandfather who was in his stocking feet. Wanting to make sure that my grandfather has plenty of hay under his feet and not wanting to be conspicious in hoarding hay, I walked around the synagogue pretending not to notice the growing pile of hay under my feet, as I was shoveling it on the floor until reaching my grandfather who was so engrossed in prayers that he wouldn't move his feet for me to put the hay under.

From my play mates of that age I can recall my cousin Eli, my uncle Shloime's youngest son, and his cousin from his mothers side who's family lived next door Abraham Winograd, also another cousin of Eli's from the same side of the family a girl by the name of Sara Leiman. The four of us became classmates in the first grade Hebrew school a year later.

At times I used to play with my cousin from my father's side, a daughter of my father's brother Reuben and his wife Chashkah(nee Pinsky). They had two children at that time, a little girl Michla two years younger than I and a new born son in 1928, Shalom. It was with Michla that I played when I used to visit them. That little Michla had a head of curly blond hair like her mother. Once as I was visiting them on a Friday night, playing around a table, Michla, a three year old child got too close to the lit Sabbath candles on the table and her hair caught on fire. She started to scream and I, a five year old, screamed with her. By that time her parents got to her and put the fire out but her hair were noticeably singed.

This did not interfere in her growing up to be a beautiful young girl only to be murdered at the age of 17 with her family by the nazis during the slaughter of Drohychin on October 15, 1942.

It seems that my mother wasn't to keen on sending me to the new Heder in late fall, for I stayed home that winter of 1928-29.

About the same time violent upheavals were taking place in the land of Israel, at that time called Palestine. The large Arab population turned against it's small and defenseless Jewish minority killing individuals or slaughtering and driving out entire communities like the ancient community of Hebron, killing in the process 70 Jews among them women and children.

At night when my mother used to put me to bed I used to ask her why are the Arabs doing it, to which of course she had no answer. However to calm me down she began to say with me the "Kreyat Shmah Al Hamita"(night prayer) ending the prayer by wishing a good night individually to every member of the family including cousins, saying that this prayer will protect me from all evil.

For the record I'd like to say that I have memerized this prayer in a matter of a few days and had been saying it nightly ever since even in the darkest and most despairing nights of my life, ending by wishing every member of my family a good night, knowing only too well that they are not alive any more, that they were put to death by the nazis in the cruelest way but hanging on to their memory and intending to continue to my last days.

That winter, 1928-29, I spent most of my time at home with my mother and sister Sheva. It was right after Pesach(Passover) in early spring of 1929 that I started attending the Heder of Yankl-Berl Eisenstein.

Yankl-Berl ruled the Heder with an iron fist. I can still see him at the head of a long narrow table around which some two dozen boys between the ages of 6-12 sit tightly together, in his hand a long thin rod, with a well aimed lash over a boys ear, no matter how far away, he keeps the attention of his charges to the lesson. A boy sitting next to him could expect a stab from Yankl-Berl's thick finger that would leave a mark for several days.

I only attended Yankl-Berl's Heder from after Pesach to Shavuot(Passover to Pentecost) that is the spring of 1929. I was already six years old and time for a formal Jewish education in the local private Hebrew school known as the "Yavnah Hebrew school Affiliated with Tarbut in Shershev".

Among the peculiarities of Shereshev I'll mention a story of 2 young gypsy brothers who came to settle in Shereshev shortly before World War One. The older one by a couple of years, Vavrus, and the younger Jan, by the family name of Tshubrevitch.

They married local peasant girls and began to raise families. The small parcels of land they received as dowry fell far short of supporting a family, so they resorted to their traditional trading in horses, which wasn't always fair nor honest. In fact, they were not particular if the horse was honestly acquired or outright stolen. It was well known that this kind of horse-dealers could travel a long distance away, steal a horse, bring it home and sell it at a bargain price with the hope that the true owner will never come to these parts of the land and recognize his horse, claim it and send the thief to jail.

It also worked the other way around. They could steal a horse nearby, take it a far distance away and sell it there.

Of course, the government took precautions against horse stealing. Each owner of a horse had to have a booklet called "A Horse Passport", in which the horse was described in every minute detail, so that each horse could be identified, thus creating a black market on horse passports. The passport of dead horses was useless and did not have to be turned in to the authorities. If a farmer's horse died they quite often used to sell the passport to dishonest horse dealers that used to collect them for shady transactions.

The older of the two gypsy brothers had at least a dozen sons. For my time most of them were grown men. They, the sons went in the footsteps of their father. Because of their numbers the local people feared them.

There was hardly a Sunday when those young gypsies didn't get together with some farmers, local or from nearby villages, to drink vodka, get drunk, and finish the drinking-bout with a fight. The gypsies always came out on top, and if they didn't, they carried the grudge for a long time. Eventually, a week a month or even 6 months later, they would gang up on that particular peasant or small group of peasants, and beat them up savagely.

The easiest and most effective way to scare or take revange of a peasant was to set his buildings on fire. That is, his house, barn and stable. All farm buildings in our area including the farm houses were built of wood and had thatched roofs and all it took was one match to set them ablaze. Due to the nearness of the buildings on the farmsteads, it was a

foregone conclusion that if one building caught fire, the rest on the farm would follow suit immediately. Most of the time not giving the farmer a chance to save the animals. To a farmer it was a catastrophe, for none of them could afford insurance.

It was not beyond those gypsies to do it and everyone in shtetl and surrounding villages knew it and feared them.

It happened on a Thursday, on market day, which used to take place on every Mondays and Thursdays when the patriarch Vavrus was driving through the marketplace sitting in a buggy, pulled by a horse. A farmer recognized this horse, which was stolen from him some months earlier. By chance, there was a policeman nearby and the farmer alerted him immediately. When the policeman stopped Vavrus and demanded to see the horse's passport, Vavrus calmly gave a jerk on the reins, and pulled away. The policeman, irate, incensed, outraged or shamed, fired, killing Vavrus instantly.

The shtetl was thrown into confusion. The market place, the center of the shtetl became a place of panic. The farmers in terror began to harness the horses, leaving town in a hurry. The storekeepers shut their stores and stands and ran home.

It was only a matter of minutes before Vavrus's sons found out what happened and in blind rage began looking for the policeman who fired the shot, but who had the good sense to disappear immediately. They burst into the police station ready to kill. Not finding him there, they looked for him at home. Unable to find him, they threatened to set the whole shtetl on fire.

The remaining 4 policemen felt helpless against the 2 gypsy families who were known criminals and in such a moment were capable of anything. Having no other recourse called for help from the neighboring town of Pruzany.

Within half an hour, over 20 policeman arrived and together with the local ones started arresting the men of the 2 gypsy families.

To understand the fear that people of the region had of the gypsies will suffice to point out that despite the fact that there were 3 policeman to every arrested gypsy male, as they were being led in a procession towards the police station, they were followed by the volunteer fire brigade pulling their equipment in case, though in chains, the gypsies could still set fire to some of the houses.

My mother made my sister, Sheva and me put on our overcoats in case we had to run out of the house. We were looking out of the

drape drawn windows, as they were being led surrounded by a cordon of police.

It was the first time, I saw men in chain and leg irons. Very scary to a six year old boy.

A couple of days later my mother took my sister and me to the town square, where we could still see the blood stains of the killed gypsy.

The end of the story was that after a few days in jail, the gypsies cooled off and returned home to continue their way of life.
The policeman was never again seen in Shereshev, transferred supposedly far away.

To the gypsy story, I will come back with a few more lines later on.

That very night my father arrived from the village of Wierchy to stay in Shershev for good. Having concluded a deal with a Pole who had a license for a retail sale of liquor in Shershev in exchange for my father's license in Wierchy.

After the Shavuot holidays I was enrolled into the Kindergarten that was under the Hebrew school supervision for the duration of the summer vacations, to prepare me for the first grade Hebrew school.

I attended the kindergarten or "Gan" as it was called in Hebrew six days a week except for Saturdays, 4 hours a day from 8-12 noon. The rest of the days I used to spend between my grandparents Auerbuch's house and my uncle Shloime's.

He, my uncle, was then already in the U.S. having gone there a year earlier. Many of the nights I used to sleep over at my grandparent's Auerbuch where in the early morning or in the afternoons I used to watch my grandfather attending the vegetable gardens, both in front and in back of the house.

For me he was opening a new world which I was seeing for the first time with the eyes of a 6 year old. Vistas I can still remember.

That summer of 1929 my mother gave birth to my only brother Leibl, whom my father soon after changed to the Russian name of "Liova".

Weeks before his birth my grandmother Freida-Leah, used to spend a fair amount of time with us, especially when my mother was pregnant, she used to speak with apprehension and concern about the upcoming birth.

It should be mentioned that in those days a birth was a serious event, and complications even death was not uncommon. There was no hospital in Shershev and the only one to turn to was a midwife. True she looked distinguished and professional. A Polish young woman from western Poland, well spoken and of elegant bearing, yet she did not look like a miracle worker.

At that time my father was still in the village of Wierchy. My mother went into labor. As only the three of us, that is my mother, sister Sheva and I, lived alone in that large rented house, my grandmother Freida-Leah spent all that time with us, not letting my mother out of her sight.

As soon as the labor pain started my grandmother sent a neighbour for the midwife. However before the midwife showed up, my brother was born in front of my grandmother, my sister and me.

I can still recall my feelings of panic as well as marvel, looking at the new life my mother just brought into the world. It is difficult to recall or describe the impressions of a six year old when he sees a new born little soul that just came out of its mother's womb.

The little new born baby looked beautiful and came into the world with loud cries as if to say why did you bring me into this world to die so young and so mercilessly. My grandparents called my father who came next day to Shershev.

The local Moyel(circumciser) Shmuel Tzemachowitch, who made a living from not only the slaughter of fowl and animals but also by buying up the hides of the animals he slaughtered and selling them to the tanneries and who performed circumcision on at least a generation of Jewish males in Shereshev, performed the circumcision on my brother and it was there that he gave him the name of "Leibl".

On the day of circumcision many children from the neighborhood came around, uninvited guests, asking me to bring them out what was then called "Nashary," that consisted of "Bob"(large soft beans). "Nahit", (a kind of pea), and "Yodern"(a kind of pumpkin kernels). It made me feel good in the role of a generous giver, particularly in front of the older boys.

The new business was much easier on my father. No more long hours and catering at times to drunks. Now it was a regular store from 8 in the morning to 6 in the evening and dealing with a much nicer clientele. To a store came people who did not want to be seen entering a place frequented by drunks. At best where the conversation was loud and

crude. They came to us, bought the drink and put it in a bag or pocket and went home. We, the children, my sister and I were delighted to have our father home every evening. We did not have to wait for a holiday in order for him to come, nor did we have to undertake an overnight tiring trip to Wierchy for our summer visits with him. It must have been a treat for him too, for he used to spend a fair amount of time with the 2 of us children.

My father rented a store on the main street called Mostowa, not far from where we lived. The store could easily be attended by one person. If my father had to leave the store for an hour or two, my grandfather , mother's father, Laizer-Bear, used to stay in the store to help him out, as he was already retired.

My grandfather from my father's side, Yaakov-Kopel was running his own business, a hardware store. Besides the store, he held the office of the mayor of the shtetl. This office was shared between him and a Christian named Szlykiewicz. It used to alternate between the two of them every other year.

One evening, after my father returned to Shereshev he gave us, my sister and I a stack of receipt booklets which he brought from Wierchy. The pages were sticky on one side. My sister and I, not knowing what to do with it, would make designs on the wall with them. Once we made a pattern of a large house on the wall and my father jokingly said it is as big as the Bet-Hamikdash. (The Temple.) We children, not knowing what it meant, asked for an explanation, which turned into a lengthy conversation. One of us noted the unused sheets had a date of the year 192.....

The conversation turned to the following decades of 193.....194....until we reached the year 2000. One of us wondered aloud what it would look like to see a figure 2 and then followed by 3 zeroes. To this my parents answered that there is no reason why we children should not live to see it. How wrong they were regarding my sister Sheva, and my then infant brother Laibl, not to mention my 2 later born sisters, Sarah and Lieba.

A few weeks later a son was born to my father's brother, Joshua and his wife Mushka nee Leszczynsky, who were living in the nearby district shtetl Pruzany, 18 kilometers away. My father wanted to attend the circumcision of their first born child and decided to take me along.

As of recently a bus owned in partnership by 6 Shereshev community members was commuting between Shereshev and Pruzany 3 times daily. We took the early one at 7 in the morning for that half an hour trip on the cobblestone road. That was my first trip on a Shereshev owned bus. Besides the driver, there was also a conductor whose job it was

to sell the tickets, tie down the luggage on the roof of the bus, and help the driver in repairing the flats that used to occur quite often on those rough roads. The conductor's name was Moishe Shocherman, whose name I will mention in an event that took place some years later.

Besides his married brother Joshua, my father had a married sister in Pruzany. She was the older of the 2 sisters my father had. Her name was Sheindl (Shainah), she was married to a Laibl Pinsky, who hailed from Shereshev too. They had 2 children, the older Lisa (Leah), my sister Sheva's age, and a son Shalom (Sioma), that was born in 1927. He was a sturdy boy whose destiny wronged him from a very early age. He was not a year old when the maid left him in his carriage alone for a minute in front of their house. It happened a group of boys passed by, playfully or mischievously , one of them pushed the carriage which tipped over throwing the baby on the cement sidewalk, banging his head on it.

It took the parents and doctor some time to realize that the baby lost his hearing. No effort was too great to help him. The child was seen by the best doctors in Poland and was taken a couple of times to Vienna, at that time considered the center of the medical world. To no avail, his hearing could not be restored and he remained deaf until the end of his 15 years life span that ended in Auschwitz.

While alive, his impediment was compensated by other virtues. Like comprehension, natural wisdom, consideration, perception, and physical strength.

In the fall, I enrolled into the first grade Hebrew school and right away had 3 friends there. It was Eli Auerbach, my Uncle Shloimes youngest son, despite the fact that I was almost a year older than he, we ended up in the same grade being born in the same year 1923, I in February and he in December. The second friend was a little girl, Sarah Leiman, the daughter of Fyvel and Tzynah. Tzynah was my Aunt Esther-Lieba Auerbach's sister. So we had a mutual aunt in Esther-Liebe. The third was Avreml Wivnograd, whose father was a brother to my Aunt Esther-Lieba. The two of them, Avreml and Sara, perished in the slaughter of Drohyczyn. There were 2 more boys I became friends with in grade 1 that lasted until Auschwitz. Unfortunately those 2 never came out alive. One was Hershel Snider, and the second Tevye Krugman, whose father was the originator and main driving force behind the building of the Hebrew school in Shereshev, that was opened in 1925.

Our class had between 20 and 25 pupils, mostly boys. In those days parents used to put more emphasis on educating the boys,

particularly when it came to Jewish education. The more affluent parents used to send their daughters to Hebrew school too. The poorer parents used to send their daughters to the polish school where education was free.

Only a few girls attended Heder and just for some months or a year, while the boys continued for years at a time.

A couple of years later it became compulsory for boys and girls to attend school. There were however some parents for whom the Hebrew school was, although a parochial, not religious enough and kept on sending their children to Heder.

My parents did not subscribe to it, and when I enrolled in grade 1, my sister was promoted to grade 3 and remained a head of me by 2 grades right through school.

Right at the outset of my schooling, I developed a preference for certain subjects, of which I will speak later but I remember the dislike I felt towards the Hebrew language. Maybe because of the teacher who was very strict with his pupils, 6 year old children of grade 1.

To my amazement a year later in grade 2, that feeling left me completely and I used to sit during this teacher's lessons and wondered why I hated him and his class the previous year. The teacher's name was Joel Waldshan. He was the son of a rabbi in Shereshev but as Shereshev had a rabbi already, he was given the title of Dayan. (assistant to rabbi and in charge of settling disputes and answering questions of law.) The teacher Joel had a wife and 2 sons. The older one Yaakov, my age, was in my class and the younger one by 2 years, David. Yaakov was an excellent pupil, particularly when it came to Hebrew. A couple years later, he tried his hand at writing poetry.

The later events put an end to his ambitions and his life. They all perished in the small shtetl of Ivanevke (Iwanow) near Pinsk.

My parents began to look for a place to move closer to the center of the shtetl. The center itself, was a cobble-stoned square some hundred by a hundred and twenty metres, surrounded with the biggest houses in shtetl. Part of some of those houses served also as business establishments. That is, part of them were converted to stores. Two of those houses served as inns and restaurants.

In the middle of the square was an ancient building, some 50 meters long and 20 meters wide, whose origin nobody knew. It was built of large bricks that had not been used for over 200 years. The building was referred to as the "Radd-Kromen". (row of stores). Its wide sides faced east and west. The east side had 6 separated entrances that served as entrances to

the 6 stores on that side. On the west side, there were only 4 doors that lead to the 4 larger stores on that side. There were also 3 doors on each of the 2 narrow sides of the building, that is, the north and south sides. In the middle of the narrow side of the building, was an arched thoroughfare.

During the winter of 1929-30, my father bought one of the stores on the west side, the larger stores. It was on the most extreme south end of the west side and was precisely across from my father's brother, my Uncle Reuben's house and store which were both under the same roof. My father bought it from a very distinguished member of the community, Mordechay Leshtshynsky, (Leszczynsky), who was also the father of Mushka Leszczynsky, my father's brother, Joshua's wife. He, Mordechay, decided to give up his yard goods store as he was then a man in his 70's, and lived with his daughter Sara-Esther, who was then in her 40's and single. In those days, she stood little chance of grtting married. Her father had enough for himself and daughter. What ever merchandise he didn't sell , he took home and slowly sold it out from there.

Sometimes in the early fall of 1929, on a Saturday afternoon, I came to my Uncle Reuben and Aunt Chashkas's house. They, that is my aunt and the maid, were still fussing in the kitchen, cleaning up after the Sabbath meal, that was a bit late in the day. I noticed a stranger in the living room, of medium height, and a prominent stomach. The stranger looked at me and asked my uncle, "Who is he?" It is Itzak's sons, as my father used to be referred to. When I got back home, and after telling my parents about the stranger in my uncle's house, they told me that it was Herschel, my Aunt Chashkas's brother, who just came back from the Soviet Union.

I found out later that he, Herschel Pinsky, after spending the years of World War 1, deep in Russia, missed his chance of returning to Shereshev, and got stuck in the Soviet Union, after the Revolution. A dozen years later, he managed to sneak across the border into Poland and back home.

Not having much to do in Shereshev, he moved to Warsaw, where he established a trucking business.

In late fall or early winter 1929, we moved to a new location. It was to Judke, the shoemaker. He had 2 separate half houses under one roof, living in one of them, he used to rent out the second. Now we were no more than 100 meters from the town square or the so called market place. The distance to school got shorter too, by a couple of hundred meters. It wasn't so far before, but in the cold wintry mornings, to be there

by 8 o'clock, in a time when snow wasn't shoveled, for a 6 year old boy was not a picnic. That winter my mother used to walk with the 2 of us, my sister and I to school. Quite often, my grandfather Lazar Bear, used to come from his house, in those bitter cold mornings, to walk us to school.

In spring of 1930, my father started to get the new store ready for opening. He decided to have a cellar built under the floor of the store. It was the first time anybody did it in that building. It entailed to lift out the wooden floors, whose boards were 4 inches thick, and at least a century old. The smell of the wet cement is still in my nostrils. Then came the building of the shelves and counters. My father wanted everything to be just right. He also decided to leave a space between the front shelves facing the door and the wall behind for storage. For that purpose, metal bars were needed to hold the additional wall. My father took me to the blacksmith to order them. I stood there watching as the blacksmith took out the red hot bars from the fire, one at a time, and hammered them in the required shape. I, not knowing better, as soon as the bar lost its red glow, went over and touched it. Fortunately with only the tip of my fingers, burning them badly.

The next couple of weeks, I attended school with my fingers bandaged. The beneficial part of it was that I could not and did not have to write in school, nor do any written homework.

When our store was ready to be opened, the district government in neighbouring Pruzany, decided to send it a commission to check the distance from the store to the nearest church. There was in pre-war Poland a law, stating that a liquor store had to be a certain distance from a church. Any church, Catholic or Orthodox. Yet, it was not applicable to a Synagogue. It says something.

The nearest church, a Russian Orthodox, was on Kamieniec Street. The inspectors set out to measure the distance using a 50 meter long tape. Every 50 meters, they used to put there one of the many onlooking boys. So they could see how many 50 meter lengths they had. Why they could not mark down on a piece of paper the 50 meter lengths they had measured, should be accredited to the many Polish jokes going around.

One of the boys asked to stand in was a friend of my cousin Alkhonon (Harold) Auerbach. The 12 year old, asked me , a 6 year old, what it was all about. I guess my answer was not clear enough to him, and he asked my cousin Harold to explain. I am mentioning this episode because he, Harold, is the last of the family that I can remember seeing in Shereshev from that moment until the day of their departure a couple months later.

At the end, the distance from the store to the church was sufficient and the store opened on time.

The summer arrived and with it the summer vacation. My mother as far as I can remember, was always a bit on the heavier side and suffered from diabetes. The last couple of summers or springs, she used to go to a spa resort in the Carpathian Mountains called Krinica. Leaving a nice bit overweight, my mother used to come back a much slimmer person. Somehow she used to get back her weight by the time she was going to Krinica the following year.

In her absence, besides the maid, one of our grandparents, my mother's parents, used to stay with us. They stopped doing it when our father came back to Shereshev permanently.

The first time my mother took in a Jewish maid was in 1930. She was "Nyomka's" (Benjamin), a granddaughter. Why do I mention the grandfather, instead of her parents? No. She was not an orphan. It is because that "Nyomka" was the patriach of the "Pampalach." The best way to describe the Pampalach is as a kind of tribe or clan, that consisted of a round 25-30 families, related to each other biologically or by marriage and whose common denominator was a chronic poverty that afflicted all of them.

Because of that poverty they were compelled to take up the not so dignified trades and professions in shtetl. While some of them managed to eke out a living like many other poor Jews in shtetl, the others had to supplement their meager income by being brokers to horse dealers(in itself not a reputable occupation) as well as horse skinning, which took place only when a horse died from sickness, over work, or age.

That girl, by the name of Tzivia, did not stay with us too long. She spent the days with us, meals included, but went home to sleep. Once I recall, someone from her family, brought in some food for her in a tiny pot. It was some kind of a treat. She began to eat it at once. To our question as to what it was, she said that it was an unborn calf, that was taken out from a just slaughtered cow. We turned away in disgust.

It was summer 1930, my uncle Shloime received his so called "First Papers". after living in the states for 2 years. That gave him the right to apply for the rest of his family to come over. That is, his wife, my Aunt Esther-Leiba, and their children, that were still in Shereshev. The oldest son in Shereshev, was Avreml, (Abraham), who meantime married a girl from Shereshev, by the name of Channa (Anna) Maister, an extra ordinary beautiful girl, the daughter of Daniel (The blacksmith) and Malca. The hot love affair between Abraham and Channa was no secret in shtetl. Of

which some 40 years later, my father's cousin in Israel, Chaim Shemesh said to me that a best selling novel could have been written about that affair.

Shortly after the marriage, Abraham left for Argentina, leaving temporarily his wife in Shereshev with her parents, until he was able to bring her over 4 years later.

Left in Shereshev, were my uncle Shloime's 2 daughters, Chvolke (Helen), and Rose and 3 sons, the oldest Leepa (Leo), the second Alkhonon, (Harold,) and the youngest Eli (Elijahu).

The day of their departure came, the tragedy of parting in those days, is difficult to comprehend, for departing as a rule was forever. More so when parents part with a child like what my grandparents went through 2 years earlier saying good-bye to their son, my uncle Shloime.

Now the time came to say good bye to his wife and children. Knowing how much my grandparents loved their children and grandchildren and their devotion to them it is heart wrenching for me to think about it even today.

My aunt Esther-leiba was also leaving behind her parents, two married sisters and a married brother all with children.

There was a kind of tradition to the way people used to leave Shershev. you fill up a couple of boxes or crates as well as a couple sacks with what was considered indispencables in the new world, like samovars, copper pots and pans, dippers, candlesticks, feather pillows and comforters, some personal clothing etc. Loaded onto a hired wagon and while the wagon owner was holding the reins to make sure that the horse proceeds very slowly, those departing were following the wagon, entering every house they pass to say good bye to the residents. After all we all new each other from birth.

The families of those living in the houses used to start escorting the departing from the start and as they made the stops house by house some of the residents used to come out joining the family in escorting. And so the crowd grew, couple by couple family by family through the main street Mostowa turning right on Pruzaner street to the very end of the Shtetl. At that time almost half of the Jewish population was around and behind the departing who were crying with the escorting.

In this very same way we accompanied my aunt Esther-Lieba and her children. I remember crying as we got back home. How much I understood of what was happening I don't know. It is quite possible that I cried in sympathy with my mother who cried bitterly. I remember the

heap of money my father put in front of me to quiet me down as I was sitting on a table. A few days later he took it back in the form of a loan.

Despite the fact that my mother and her parents, my grandparents Laizer-Bear and Freida-Leah, had two years to come to terms with the idea that my aunt and children will be leaving, it was a very difficult moment from which I don't think they have ever really recovered.

For my mother their departure was even more difficult and her lonliness even greater a few years later when her parents, my grandparents, past away.

My aunt Esther-Lieba left behind in Shershev her parents Moishe and Pesha Winograd, a brother Israel and wife Genia Winograd with children and two married sisters; Tzina and husband Feival Leiman with two daughters Sarah and Chaya, the second sister Ghytl with her husband Yaakov-Meir Kabizetsky with five daughters.

In retrospect and in consideration of the events that took place only one short decade later, despite the pain and hurt of parting and the years of longing and yearning, it was a lucky moment, a fluke of events that got them out of Europe. Beginning with their oldest son Jacob, who was the first to set out across the ocean in 1921and became instrumental in their coming to the U.S. thus saving them from Hitler's clutches.

The school year started in beginning of September and I found myself in grade two. The same teacher Joel Waldshan that taught me Hebrew in grade one continued in grade two. I remembered my fear of him in grade one. It occurred to me to be one page or one lesson ahead of the class. As each page had a couple of new words that my father used to translate to me the evening before. I succeeded in impressing my teacher who began to treat me accordingly.

No more did I fear the teacher nor did I hate the subject Hebrew, which became my favourite.

The school was modern for that time. The teachers spoke only Hebrew among themselves as well as to the pupils in school or in the street. All subjects were taught in Hebrew except for an hour a day that was dedicated to the Polish language. The rest like Chumash (Pentateuch), Bible, mathematics, geography, nature study, history and others, were all without exception conducted in Hebrew.

Taking in consideration that the Jewish children spoke Yiddish at home, Yiddish among themselves in school, Yiddish in the street, a kind of Belaruss with the Christians, is it then a wonder that Polish was to us a foreign language? Despite the fact that we lived in Poland.

It became clear to me in later years that the local non-Jewish population considered the Polish government an occupation regime, which they resented.

As far as us Jews, we were persecuted, harassed and oppressed by whatever government was in power, we were not comfortable with any.

In the winter 1930-31 my grandfather Laizer-Bear continued to come for us in the bitter cold winter mornings to walk us to school. My sister Sheva was already in grade four. Her friends used to come to us to play with her.

My friends besides the two I mentioned earlier Tevye Krugman and Hershel Shneider whose younger by a couple of years brother Shloime, had a beautiful voice, if only, if only he would be left to live. My other newly made friends were each a year older than I and a grade higher. They were: Moishe Gelman(Meir Gelman's son), Yosl Leibershtein, (Shmuel the photographer's son) and Yankl Neibrief(Sarah Neighbrief's son).

There was a "Yeshiva"(an institution of higher Talmudic learning) in the neighbouring town of Pruzany. It was attended by local boys as well as boys from surrounding Shtetls, whose parents could not

afford to send them to high-school after studying for years in a Heder, or wanted them to continue their religious studies for the purpose of becoming a Rabbi.

There were those who studied for the sake of studying and learning, as required by Jewish tradition.

The "yeshiva" was supported partly by the "Kehilah"(organized Jewish community) of Pruzany and by private donations. Those donations were collected by literally knocking on doors of not only the rich members of the community but of the middle class too. There were even representatives of the "Yeshiva" that traveled to the neighbouring Shtetls visiting the better to do members for contributions. We were on their list and regularly, every couple of weeks two elderly distinguished looking men with long gray beards used to show up at our door. As the doors in Shtetl were never locked in the daytime, those two men used to come in right into the living room. We all new what they used to come for. I happened to hold a large coin in my hand which my mother let me hold for a while. Without hesitation I gave It to one of them. The men closed his fingers over it ready to put it in his pocket when my mother said: how much was it, for there were ten "zloty" coins in Poland, representing ten days work. The man opened his fist exposing a significant coin. My mother hesitated for a moment, it was apparently too big a donation even for our pocket, but unwilling to take it back from him she said: it's all right it goes for a good cause.

The elderly men thanked her profusely, turning to me one said "may you live to see great great grandchildren". Bidding us a good day the two visibly content left the house.

With spring of 1931 I could barely wait for vacation time so I could go to sleep at my grandparents Auerbach. Their little house seemed to me like from a fairy tale. The house some twenty metres from the road with the garden and trees in front was hidden in the summer from passerby's. It had an embankment of three quarters of a metre high made from pine needles held tightly against the wall by a fence. It served to keep the house warmer in the winter. In the summer the women from the neighbourhood used to sit on it telling each other stories and local news with not a small measure of exaggeration.

The house stood perpendicular to the street and the entrance was from the side. A low porch led to a wide single door. Behind the door you found yourself in a square hall of 2 by 2 meters. There was a door on either side of you and one in front. The door to the right led to a

kind of storeroom, where my grandparents kept nonperishable vegetables from the garden, like potatoes, cabbage, beets, carrots, turnips, radishes and alike. My grandmother kept there her homemade perserves, too.

In front of you was a door that led to a single room which an old lady by the name of Rachel Krenitzer was renting. She existed, if this is the right word, by selling milk. I will take up a couple of lines to describe her way of making a living.

Regardless if it was in summer or winter, she was at the latest, at 6 in the morning at her milk suppliers. Those were poor Jews, owners of a cow who by selling the cow's milk supplemented their meagre livlihood. There were those who owned 2 cows whose milk was their only source of income.

She, Rachel Krenitzer, used to buy the milk from those poor cow owners and carry it in 2 pail size containers to her customers. We were her customers and she used to be at our door before 7 every morning rain or shine.

I can still see my mother commiserating with that woman's lot as she used to watch her approaching our house in the cold wintery mornings, knee deep in snow, with a heavy container in each hand.

That woman had a son by the name of Nathan, married with some children, but he struggled hard enough to support his family and his mother did not want to impose on him.

The third door in my grandparents hall, led to their living quarters, which consisted of a large kitchen, that also served as a dining room and from there 2 doors led to a living room and 2 bedrooms which were not too roomy. In fact, neither of the rooms, nor the house was big, what was immence there, was the warmth and love that my sister and I experienced being with them. Those impressions and feelings have remained with me until today, 70 years later.

In spring of 1931, we moved again. This time to the very center of the shtetl. On the north side of the town square, or the Mark as it was known. There stood, parallel to the square a long house belonging to 2 owners.. In one half lived Abraham Kolodytzky, his wife and their only daughter, Rivka, a couple years younger than I. She had a beautiful voice and in 1940, she won a singing contest in Brest-Litowsk, later representing the entire province of Brest-Litowsk in the capital of Belaruss in Minsk.

Kolodytzty had a yard goods store attached to his side of the house. The other half of the house belonged to Myndl Osherkilers,

who lived there with her only not so young daughter. From that Myndl, my parents rented the half house.

At about the same time, my father bought the only still empty building lot in the square, in order to build our own house. The lot was situated on the east side of the square next to the so called large synogogue, which was indeed the largest in shtetl.

Here I will describe our newly acquired lot and its neighbourhood.

There was once a beautiful and enormous synogogue in Shereshev, whose origin nobody remembered or knew. It was apparently built about the same time as the "Radd-Kromen" (row of stores), judging by the size of the bricks and thickness or the massive walls. It stood at the northeastern corner of the town square, but about 40 meters back from the row of houses, thus leaving a large space in front of it, that reached to the town square. It was assumed that it was left deliberately for the town Jews to assemble in times of festivities. One has to have in mind that the Jewish population of Shereshev 2 centuries ago was twice as large then it was between the 2 world wars.

The synogogue burned down in the beginning of the first World War. All that remained were the 4 massive walls, the ceiling and the impressive 4 columns on which a massive peddiment was resting, giving the entire front of the edifice an imposing magnificient romanesque distinction.

Before the start of the first World War, the Jewish leadership in Shtetl, realized the need for one large synogogue to serve as a gathering place for the entire community if needed. For the enormous synogogue or Shul, as it was referred to, was not in used in winter. I can still remember the cavernous inside of the structure with its 2 immence pillars supporting the ceiling which did not collapse even 20 years after the fire. Because it was impossible to keep this building warm in winter, the community decided to build a year round one to the one described above.

So another new synogogue was built partly in front of the old shul, which was appropriately called The Large Synogogue. This made it the 7th synogogue in town and the third to be built of bricks. The first was the huge and beautiful one which was the pride of the shtetl, for it was considered to be one of the three largest and the most beautiful in pre-partitioned Poland. The second was centuries old but of no eye catching appearance and the third, was the new one, the large synogogue. The other 4 synogogues were built of wood.

Partly in front and somewhat to the right of the burned synogogue, parallel to the other houses in the square, was a building lot that belonged to an elderly man by the name of Pellet Aprik. This man left for America as a young man before World War 1 and after several year came back with apparently some money. In any case, enough to buy a house in the townsquare, a store in the Radd-Kromen, across his house, a garden behind his house, next to the Shul, and another house in an alley off Mostowa Street. (The Main Street.)

It seems that his luck turned around shortly after he returned to Shereshev. His big house in the townsquare burned down, with no insurance he could not rebuild it. The building lot remained empty and with time, it grew over with grass and weeds. All that remained visible were the large stones that were part of the foundation.

This than lot my father bought from him for the price of $450. US dollars, a fortune of money in those times, not only in Shereshev but anywhere else too. The world was suffering then the agony of the Depression and for this kind of money, it was possible to build a house in Shereshev on any street, but not in the Mark,(town square).

The rented house we lived in had a porch, which was partly closed in and to me-for unknown reasons, the closed in part was cool in the summer. One Friday evening, as my father and I returned from the synogogue, (my father was a member in the Rabbi's Synogogue, which was on "Ostrowiecka" Street, where my grandfather Laizer-Bear Auerbach was the Gabbi (Trustee), my mother announced that after tonight's meal, we will have something special for dessert, which is cooling at present in the closed in porch. After finishing the Friday night's sumptious meal, my mother with a touch of fanfare, brought in a large bowl and placed it in the middle of the table. The bowl was full of a reddish fluid. After further investigation, we realized it was congeeled. To our question of what it is, my mother answered it was "GELATIN". Thus we were introduced to a new treat what is known today as "Jello".

In August of that summer, my mother gave birth to a girl, she was named Sara, but we called her Sonia. That made 4 children in the family.

The summer vacation was coming to an end. My sister Sheva was due to enter grade 5, and I in to grade 3. My father however, and rightly so, decided to transfer my sister to the Polish school, the so called "Powszechna", (public), claiming that we live in Poland and we have to know the language of the land, which the students of the Hebrew

School hardly knew and only a dozen families in Shereshev used it. Not to mention the over 100 villages belonging to the Shereshev parish where Polish was a foreign language.

Lacking sufficient Polish, she was accepted in grade 4 public school, thus losing a year's schooling, having finished the 4th grade Hebrew school. However, a private Hebrew teacher used to come to our house daily to teach her Hebrew. From then on, my sister and I attended two separate schools.

With the fall, came our Jewish New Year, where Jews spend many hours in the synogogue in prayers. In those days, and even now among Orthodox Jews, it is customary not to come into the synogogue with leather footwear, during the days of awe. Synthetic footwear was unavailable, the older men would take off their shoes and pray in stocking feet.

To cushion the floor, they used to spread hay over it. In order to make sure my grandfather had enough hay under his feet, I used to walk around the synogogue pushing with my feet some hay in front of me, depositing it near my grandfather. He was so absorbed in his prayers, that he would not notice it and I would have to put the hay with my hands under his feet.

My father then in his 30's and others in his age, did not take their shoes off. I suspect at the age of 6,7 or 8, I was more concerned and attached to my grandfather, than to my father, who was away during the first 6 years of my life, except for his brief visits to us or our summer visits to him.

After the days of awe, that is Rosh Hashana and Yom Kipper (Day of Atonement), came the holiday of Succot (Tabernacles). My grandfather Lazar-Bear erected a Succah(Tabernacle), which was lit by a wooden framed lantern with a candle burning inside. In my grandparents absense, the candle burnt to the bottom and the lantern caught fire. Fortunately my grandparents came in as the wall of the Succah began to burn. A few minutes later, they would have lost their house as the Succah was attached to it.

Sometime earlier, during that summer, the members of our synogogue decided to get an additional Sayfer-Torah (Scrolls of the Torah). There was in Shereshev a scribe and he undertook the job of writing it. What I remember of it is that just about every Jew in Shtetl went to the scribe as he was writing and my mother took me too.

The scribe sat in a separate room next to a large table on which lay an open Torah scroll , partly covered with writing. With a pen, whose tip I could not tell, he kept on writing very carefully on the parchment in an amazingly uniformed printed letters and in a straight line as if the parchment was lined.

There were a few people ahead of me, and when my turn came the scribe, as with the others, gave me the pen in hand for a second and then taking it back wrote a word on the scroll. I assume on my behalf. Understandably, everyone left some change, a contribution towards the Torah scroll.

The scribe was a very respected man and there were all kinds of stories circulating about his piety and devotion to G-d and the Torah. They used to say that before he had to write down the name of G-d, he used to go to the Mikvah (pool for ritual immersion), for "Tvila" (purification immersion.)

Eventually, the Sayfer Torah was ready. The Scribe brought it to the Rabbi, shortly before "Rosh-Hashana", (Jewish New Year.) From there, it was carried under a "Chuppa" (Wedding canopy,) to our synagogue with great fanfare.

The Sayfer Torah under the canopy, was surrounded by almost the entire community. As it was getting dark,, everybody held a lit candle in hand and the man sang passages from the psalms and other prayers.

For us youngsters and even young boys and girls, it was a first time event that used to come up in conversations years later.

After the "Sukkoth" (Tabernacle holidays), which brings with it the inevitable frost, my father took with him an expert on trees by the name of Benjamin Goldberg and together with a government agent from the forestry department, they left to pick out the right trees which had to be cut for building our house .

To build our house, the expert had to pick the right trees from which 12 meter long and 6 by 12 inch beams had to be cut for the walls of the house. The forester marked them down, then they all left for the forestry department to settle on the price.

This process took several days. Shortly after, peasants from the surrounding villages and some local ones, began hauling in the huge pine trunks, unloading them on our newly bought building lot, and on the adjoining yard of the big synagogue, after an agreement was made

with the president of the synagogue. Specially hired men began to peel the bark of the tree trunks marking them with straight lines by placing a thin soot covered cord at both ends of the log tautly, then lifting the middle of the cord and letting it snap along the tree trunk.

Each log used to be hoisted onto two saw horses on either side. One man stood on top of the log and two below lifting and pulling a long saw up and down. Thus cutting the log into the needed building material. A couple of crews worked at it continuously throughout the entire winter.

For me it was a new and interesting experience. There was no shortage of spectators, children and grown-ups. My friends used to like going with me to watch, as with me they would not be chased by the workers.

My circle of friends became larger during that time, with the addition of the two brothers Lazar and Litek Rotenberg, Kalman Kalbkoif, Itzik Maletzky and Meir Kalbkoif. Our group numbered 11 boys.

The two brothers Rotenberg lived on the west side of the "Mark" (town square). Kalman Kalbkoif on the south side, and Itzik Maletzky in the south eastern side, right at the start of Ostrowiecka Street. Meir Kalbkoif lived in a side lane off the "Mark", named Zaszkolna.

All those above mentioned boys, except of Litek Rotenberg, were by a year or two older than I. Incidentally, the two brothers Rotenberg were both born on February the third, Litek in 1923, and Lazar In 1921.

In early spring of 1932, hired men started to get the foundation for the house ready.. For this purpose, the large stones of the previous foundation were used with the addition of more brought in from the out lying farms. The stones were cemented together forming a stone and cement quadrangle, giving the appearance of a meter high fortress.

On this foundation the builders lay the first row of timber which consisted of heavy beams, 10 by 10 inches thick. They were locked together in the corners by cut out in them niches. For good luck in the bottom beam, a little hole was drilled in which an old coin was deposited plus a piece of bread and salt as an omen for the residence for long and plentiful life.

Who could have imagined then that only 7 short years later, the Bolshevics would not only take away from us our new

home without compensation, but tell my father to be thankful that we are not being sent to Siberia.

The building of the house took most of the summer, and I spent a lot of time watching the progress. Never the less, I did not forget to visit my maternal grandparents, the Auerbachs.

From early spring, my grandfather, Lazar-Bear used to bring me to school different dishes or treats that my grandmother Freida-Leah or my mother used to make for me. At 11 o'clock, during the long break, my grandfather was always there waiting for me with that special treat. While eating, I used to try to talk to him and share with him my morning experience, but he never failed to remind me and say "It is written that one does not talk while one eats." He wanted me to finish everything before the bell.

That summer during my many visits to my grandparents, I noticed my grandmother Freida-Leah changing dressings on my grandfather's neck, just at the base of his head. It looked like a fair sized ulcer. Over the summer I even noticed that it got bigger. It seemed to me that they intended to cure it without a doctor's help, as it did not interfere in his daily movements or activities.

The building of the house progressed nicely. The house ran parallel to the square. To the back part of the house was added an extension under which a large cellar was built. In these cement walls of the cellar were niches in which shelves were inserted, that could hold all kinds of jars, pots, etc. In the roof of the extension a "Fligl" (a movable part of the roof), was built in so it can be opened over a "Sukkah"(Tabernacle), that could be erected under it.

To do the carpenter work 2 brothers were hired. One Chaim Tenenbaum, with his 2 sons "Itche" and "Berl", and the second David Tenenbaum, with his son "Berl".

They made the windows, doors and 2 porches for the 2 front doors. One of those entrances, the Bolshevics closed in, after they took our house away from us.

Our house was the only one in Shereshev that had a double floor. There was a space of 20 centimeters between the two, that was filled in with charcoal. The charcoal served a double purpose, to absorb the dampness and to keep the warmth inside the house.

In that same summer of 1932, electricity was introduced in my shtetl. All summer long many of the townspeople watched as workers were digging in tall wooden posts and copper wires are being

strung along their porcelain insulators. In most houses a direct wire led to the single bulb in the house and the proprietor paid a flat rate per bulb. We must have been one in no more than a dozen households that had a meter, for we had electric bulbs in every room .

Shereshev came into the modern era, with lit streets, so that one could walk at night on the wooden sidewalk without the danger of tripping over a protruding board. True, the lights or power used to come on at sunset and go out at midnight, and was accessible to the houses on the main streets. But then again, who walked in those eternally muddy lanes. The owners of the power station were also the proprietors of a flour mill, built in 1930, the first in Shereshev with an up to date diesel motor. They were : Pessach Maletzky and Raizl Zubatzky. Pessach's son Itzyk was one of my friends and Raizl Zubatzky was our former landlady where we lived in 1929.

The school year 1931-32 began and I found myself in grade 3. A new principal by the name of Yaakov-Shaye Peker took over. The teacher Yoel Waldshan became vice-principal. Another local young man, just graduated from teachers seminar in Wilno became a teacher too. His name was Yankl Judelewsky. There was another teacher by the name of Nitzberg from the neighboring town of Pruzany and one more from western Poland by the name of Lipkind, a student of law in university but had to give up his studies temporarily for financial reasons.

Right after the start of the school year, we moved into our new home. Something strange or unusual happened to me, that I cannot explain even today. A day or two, after we moved in I began to get headaches. The worst used to be as soon I got out of bed in the morning. It used to ease up during the day, but the pain never left me completely. To me it was unusual for I never experienced headaches.

A day before Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year), the Mezuzot arrived (a small tube containing an inscribed strip of parchment attached to the doorpost of Jewish homes,) that my father ordered in Brest-Litovsk some time earlier. Here is the mystery. As soon as my father affixed the Mezuzot to the doorposts, my headaches dissappeared for good.

I leave it open for the reader to come to any conclusion.

Through that summer and fall the sore on my grandfather Lazer-Bear's neck, despite my grandmother's attention, and the doctor's ointment, got worse. Finally, the dorctor suggested to take my grandfather to the Pruzany hospital. As soon as the doctors took a look at it,

they told my mother to rush him immediately to Brest-Litovsk, where there was a much bigger hospital and better qualified doctors.

My mother took him to the hospital in Brest-Litovsk, where he was operated on immediately. A couple days after the operation, the surgeon told my mother to go home, as it is a long process and with her being there, she will not help anybody, as my mother was pregnant then and had 2 little children at home, besides my sister Sheva and me.

My mother returned home for a few days, leaving her father under the attention of the surgeon and some relatives there.

Two days after my mother returned home, she received an urgent telegram from the hospital to come immediately. In those days a trip from Shereshev to Brest-Litovsk was a matter of 24 hours.

I don't know by what means of transportation she got there. I only know that she left immediately. When she got to the hospital there, the surgeon informed her that it became necessary to operate on my grandfather again and he could not wait any longer for my mother's concent. He also told her that the operation took place without an anesthesia because of his age and state of health.

My mother was permitted to see him. He recognized her and asked if she heard his screams during the operation. She answered : "You know daddy I was then in Shereshev," to which he said "You could have heard it there."

My grandfather's condition deteriorated very fast. The doctor told my mother to take him home, as they could do nothing for him. He used those words and I am repeating the way my mother told us. "Only G-d in Heaven can help him now."

How my mother brought him back home I don't remember. It had to be by ambulance or taxi. He couldn't have withstood a train ride. When I saw my grandfather the next evening, he seemed to be unconscious. The only word he was continuously saying was "Water." Otherwise, he was oblivious to everything else. My mother and grandmother who were constantly at his side, kept on wetting his lips, as the doctor ordered not to give him anything to drink.

Right after school, my sister Sheva and I used to run to our grandparents. There were always people in there, neighbours and members of the synogogue. Maybe because of the many people or maybe of never having been confronted with a death in the family, I did not realize the severity of the situation.

Two or three days later, coming into my classsroom, a classmate of mine, by the name of Abraham Winograd, who lived 4 houses from my grandparents, unceremoniously told me, that my grandfather died early that very morning.

The teacher who came into the class and heard the news, sent me home right away. From there I ran to my grandparents, where I found the house full of people. My grandfather was lying on the floor covered with a white sheet, two candles in candlesticks, were burning on either side of his head. Bent over him, stood my mother and my grandmother crying bitterly, the other women in the house, cried with them.

A few minutes later, a quiet whispering took place between my mother, grandmother, and a few other women. They put me down sitting on the floor, with my back to my grandfather, my grandmother took his hand by the wrist, rubbing his already rigid hand over my back, saying something so quietly, that even I couldn't hear what.

The whole process took a minute or two. Today, I still don't know what it meant or what sort of a remedy or omen it was. Nor do I know why they didn't to it to my sister Sheva or my almost 3 year old brother Liova (Leibl.)

The "Chavrah-Kadisha"(voluntary burial society), started the "Thaharah"(purification of the body.) That is, to wash the corpse and dress it in traditional "Takhrikhim"(Shrouds.) This is done by men only, if the departed is a male, and by women if it is a female.

I stood by the entire procedure and watched as they pulled out from the hole at the base of my grandfather's head, a closter of dressings that left a space in which a man's fist could easily fit in. I looked at it in horror, as a shudder went through me. In my 9 year old mind, I could not comprehend to what they have done to my grandfather and how cruel and merciless the doctors were to him.

I was glad when they put the shrouds on him and wrapped him in his "Tallith" (Prayer Shawl.), so I wouldn't have to look at the gapping hole in his head.

When they finally put him on the "Mittah"(a stretcher on which the corpse is placed and carried,) and carried him out of the house, I noticed that my school and teachers were lined up in front of the house, waiting for the funeral. As far as I remember or know, this was the only time that the Hebrew School participated in a funeral.

It took place on the 18th day of the month of Cheshvan, according to the Jewish calender. There was a large crowd in the

street. The school children stood 2 in a row, with the school teachers keeping an eye on them.

Just like all other small shtetls in eastern Europe, so in Shereshev at a funeral, the body lying on the "Mittah" (stretcher), was carried all the way to the cementary on the shoulders of volunteers what is considered to be a "Mitzvah"(a good deed.) So it was with my grandfather, except that this time the procession took a detour to the Rabbi's synogogue, where my grandfather was the "Gabbi," (Trustee.) for many years, as a matter of fact, to his very last day.

There in front of the synogogue, to be more explicit, from its porch, he was eulogized and carried to the cementary, where his grave was ready and waiting for him.

I looked on with curiousity and grief, as they lowered my granfather into the cold and damp ground, putting 4 boards around the 4 sides of the pit at the bottom, that formed a kind of box. A small white sack was filled with earth and placed under his head. Two small pieces of black broken pottery was placed over his closed eyes and his face was sprinkled with earth from Israel. In each hand, rather between the fingers of each hand, was put a smalll twig and after being gently but fully wrapped with his "Tallit" (Prayer Shawl), boards were put over him that rested on the edges of the previously put in perpendicular four boards, thus forming a kind of box over and around him.

As soon as this was done, men began to fill in the grave while I was looking on with a grieving heart as the cold and damp earth was covering my grandfather, the than most loved by me human being, second only to my mother. It was the first time that I attended a funeral and it had to be my granfather's.

My grandmother Freida-Leah, did not remain long in the house. She sold it and rented a room at an elderly widow by the name of Themma Kwelman. The house was on the same street but closer to the centre, thus closer to us. That Themma Kwelman lived with a single son, Abraham who was the assistant bookkeeper in the local bank and with her 2 daughters. The name of the older one, Feigl and the younger one Ghitl. The source of that woman's income was a store in the "Raad Cromen" (row of stores in the town square.)

It must have been difficult for my grandmother to get used to her new life style, losing a husband after 55 years of marriage, and having to leave the house in which she was born and lived a life time. All she had left in Shereshev, was her daughter, my mother and us, her

grandchildren. My grandmother corresponded with her son, our Uncle Shloime (Salomon), since he left Shereshev and very little with her other son, Philip, who used to write rarely,in contrast to his brother Shloime, who used to be a prolific and eloquent letter writer.

Our grandmother, Freida-Leah was a loving and wholly devoted person and grandmother, and despite my sister Sheva's and mine tender age, we understood and felt her love and devotion to us. Now, we felt came the time, although in a small way, to reciprocate for all we owed her. There was not a day, that my sister and I did not visit her and if G-d forbid it was getting dark, and we have not seen her yet, our mother used to remind us.

Interesting to note, that my grandmother, Freida-Leah, nee Goldfarb, could trace her ancestry in Shereshev many generations. I recall once, my grandfather, Laizer-Bear took me with him to the cementary on the anniversary day of the death of my grandmother's grandfather. How we struggled to get to the grave site in the old part of the cementary. The large trees, the fallen branches, which my grandfather was throwing on the side, so we can move ahead. The moss on grave-stone and barely legiable inscription all proof of my grandmother's roots in Shershev. Yet my grandmother had no relatives there in my time. All we knew is, that she had a brother, in Simforopol, in Crimea, by the name of Boris-Leib Goldfarb. He moved there before the first World War, and remained there, corresponding with my mother up to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June of 1941.

His son Yosl Goldfarb lived in Pruzany, they had 2 children, a daughter Pearl, my sister Sheva's age, and a son Menachem, my age, who survived Auschwitz, and is living now in Louisville, Kentucky.

In grade 3, we were introduced to new subjects, like nature study, geography and even a start in physics. I can still see myself struggling to understand the map as the river Vistula flows to the Baltic sea northwards. Yet on the map going upwards. I must have overcome the problem, for geography became one of my favorite subjects, whose teacher in grade 3 was the principal Peker.

The principal ran the class and the school with an iron hand. His presence in class used to instill terror with the pupils. His political conviction was Zionist-Revisionistic which manifested inself in his every idea and action, even in his family life.

Revisionism, or its ideal of Z ionism was until then unknown in Shereshev. There were the so called "Leftists Zionist Organizations like the "Hashomer Hatzair" or "Hachalutz", to which many of

the young people belonged, and in which my uncle, my father's youngest brother Eli(Eliyah) was very active in the early 30's.

The new year of 1933 was approaching and I couldn't wait to write the year 1933, the two consecutive 3s after the number 19. It has been my priviledge to have written, not only the two consecutive numbers 3, but also the 4s, 5s, 6s, 7s,8s and hope to write the 3 numbers nine too. I say priviledged, for it is because of the merits and intervention to the almighty of my parents, grandparents and their ancestors, that I ascribe my survival and lived to see it and write about it, for very few of my shtetls contemporaries and none of my peers, could make such a claim.

With the winter snow, farmers from the nearby villages, used to start bringing in wagons full, or sleds full, of firewood which they used to cut down in the surrounding forest, and sell to the Jewish population, which was not permitted to cut it. The wood used to be stacked in the yards where it remained until the next fall. By then, it was good and dry and taken into wood sheds, where it was used the following winter for heating the houses and cooking. This system, of providing fuel was a generations old tradition and the only source of fuel in our part of the world.

Thus went by the first winter in our own house. Despite the cold and snow that used to accompany our severe winters. Our home in which our father put so much of his life and soul in, was a big and comfortable house for Shereshev. A large kitchen and 7 spacious rooms of which 3 served as bedrooms. One room with a separate front entrance was left empty as my father was planning to open someday another store. The other 3 rooms served as a dining room, living room and parlour room. As far as I knew, our house was the only one in shtetl, that had permanent double windows and heavy massive outside doors.

Despite the size and spaciousness of the house, I used to loathe the so-called "laundry days" that used to take place every 2 months or so. It was a 3-day process when the kitchen and nearby rooms were stocked with piles of dirty laundry. First the laundry had to be washed by hand with the help of a washboard and strong soap. Next, the washed laundry was put in a huge copper boiler that stood on the cooking stove and took up all the 4 burners. After thorough boiling, it was washed again in a wash tub, in which a tiny tube of a dark blue substance was added with each load, which made the white laundry whiter.

It was only after the second washing and wringing that the laundry was hung out in the sun and specially strung strings to dry. On rainy cloudy days, or in winter, it used to be hung in the attic. Outside in

the sun, the laundry used to dry within hours, but in the attic it took much longer, especially in the winter, when the wet laundry used to freeze before it had a chance to dry and had to be brought into the house still frozen and in the shape of the person it belonged to. It was especially applicable to mens combination underwear, which was always a subject of a remark or joke. When it came to put the laundry away, it had to be done over with a special heavy rolling pin, ironed and everything had its place, but that was done of course later by my mother and the maid.

To do the laundry, my mother used to get another woman by the name of "Izbyta", who spent many years in Jewish homes doing laundry and learning to speak Yiddish as good as any Jew.

Because the laundry days entailed so much work and was such a big undertaking, which involved constant trips to the well for water, nobody looked forward to it and was putting it off for as long as possible. Therefore, everybody in the family had cupboards full and drawers full of underwear. The more one had, the longer one could wait for doing the laundry and the longer one waited, the more dirty laundry accumalated.....

Here I'm speaking of our family and for the ones close to us. How the poor or poorer managed, I would rather not speculate.

We settled in our new and own home. No longer did we have to think of moving, and it seemed that we found permanancy where not only I, my sister and brother were born, but so were my parents.

Half of my friends lived within 100 meters from me and from our windows I could see their homes. On the left, on the same side of the market place (Square)as our house lived Itzel Maletzky, his father was a half partner to the flour mill and electric station in schtetl. Their house was on the very corner of the Ostrowiecka Street and market square. In the middle of the southern side of the market, lived my friend Kalman Kalbkouf, whose father was one of the ten butchers in town. Across our house on the west side of the market lived the 2 brothers and friends of mine, Laizer (Lazar) and Litek Rotenberg.

With the two brothers Rotenberg, I became very close friends and used to spend a lot of time with them. Their father was the book keeper in a flour mill which belonged partly to their grandfather Yoshua Pinsky. Their home was attached to Yoshua Pinsky's house, which was without a doubt, the largest house in Shereshev. In this house where Yoshua lived with his wife, Bluma and occupied several rooms was also his hardware store. Yet the largest part of the house, was rented out to the pharmacist

Baumriter, who lived there with his wife and 2 daughters in quite roomy quarters with enough space for a large pharmacy and additonal storeroom.

The main drawing card of that place for us boys, was not the building as much as everything behind it. It stretched for many meters long. The first thing one would notice was another house that was always rented out. Behind that house, was a row of different buildings, like barns, stables, warehouses, and other buildings that were never used. Behind those buildings, were large gardens in which grew all concievable kinds of vegetables. In season, nothing tasted better than the sweet peas off the stalk that grew there.

It was beyond the gardens, that we used to find the main attraction and challenge. It was there, that the swamps used to start and continued without end, for we never dared to challenge the unknown.

After taking off the shoes and socks, rolling up the pants as high as they would go, we used to start moving slowly into the murky water teeming with all kinds of creatures, beetles of all sort, sizes and shapes. Crawling wormlike creatures, whose slimy shapes were enough to scare. Most of those swamps and marshe denizens were green, used to blend with the thick lush surroundings. Soon we had to take off our pants if we did not want to get a tongue lashing from our parents.

The challenge was to see how far one could get into that swamp before falling into it over the head. The trick was to find with your foot a strong enough root or vine under the water that would support you, lower your weight on it, and look for the next one. The problem of course was that some vines or roots could let go just when you thought you are safe and you would get an unpleasant dunking. The most unpleasant visitors were the many leeches who did not wait for an invitation to attach themselves to your exposed body.

I'll say that neither the leeches nor the inevitable dunking has stopped us boys from spending many a days of our vacation time in that trully natural "amusement park."

Two houses to the left of the Rotenberg's lived another f riend of mine, Hershel Shneider, who had an older brother Eli and a younger by a year, Shlomo. That Shlomo had a beautiful voice, given the chance and schooling, he could have been a good "Chazan" (cantor) or singer. Unfortunately, Hitler saw to it that none of his entire family will remain alive.

There were a few other friends living nearby. One Yosef Leberstein , Moishe Gelman and Meir Kalbkauf.

If the above will partially account for the beautiful summer days of my pre-teen years, what about the winters? The long clear moon-lit evenings by which one could read a book without the help of additional light. Those beautiful evenings when we boys, or rather children, used to go sleigh-riding down the hill. The only hill in Shereshev leading from Ostrowiecka Street into the market square, an elevation of no more than one meter. We used to pile on top of a sleigh, one on top of the other, as high as we could. One of us running in front pulling the rope attached to the sled. Feeling the sled reached its ultimate speed, used to jerk the cord to the side, causing the sled to tip over, spilling the bunch of us on the snow. How we used to jump up filled with exuberant energy and enthusiasm to run up the hill and do it all over again.

The day used to start early as school used to start at eight. That year prayers were introduced in school before the classes to which boys were obliged to attend. So I had to be there at seven thirty. Understandably, we used to get up before daybreak. After getting washed in the kitchen, where the sink was, one of two that I knew of in Shereshev, (the other one was at my grandparents Kantorowitz), and whose outlet led simply outside the house, as there was no sewage system in Shereshev then, nor is there one now, 70 years later.

Water used to be brought in to the house in pails the night before and kept in them overnight until empty. We had a sheet metal drum with a faucet, the drum held 4-5 pails full of water and stood near the sink. The facilities were outdoors and in winter, especially at night, it was an unwelcomed experience.

For a reader of the 21st century, it might be difficult to understand.

The winter attire of the population of the shtetl at that time was far from adequate particularly considering the fact that the local moving about was done on foot and exposure to the elements was unavoidable. More than the cold, was the problem of rain and puddles which was the cause of often ocurring colds.

In our home as in the few other better to do households in Shereshev, the winter breakfasts could consist of pancakes made of buckwheat flour.An old lady used to carry it around to her regular customers every early winter morning in two baskets covered with heavy shawls to keep the heat in.My mother used to look at her with compassion and always gave her a couple more “Groshy”(pennies) than owed.Or it could also consist

of black bread and butter with milk or tea.Usually we had with it "Swiss cheese" actually produced locally.It could also be honey,halva,or sausage.

The snack or lunch taken with me to school consisted of the same as breakfast and eaten during the 20-minute recess at 11 o'clock.For the lower grades school ended at 1p.m. Coming home there was something to eat to tie us over until dinner,usually at 4p.m. There was nothing tastier than my mother's potato "kugel"(pudding) on a cold wintery afternoon.I can still see my mother turning over the hot earthern pot form which the round pyramid-shaped potato dish slid out on a wide-rimmed plate.

Dinner in winter always consisted of meat and soup. A nourishing and filling meal. Supper with the inevitable bread with every meal came cheese or halva or smoked whole fish that were available in different sizes from a sprat to a large herring. Their skin, turned golden in smoking used to come off easily on the plate.

The spring of 1933 was approaching and with it the nicest holiday of the year "Pessach" (Passover.) Right after Purim, one room in the house, in our case, the parlour, was cleaned and scrubbed and became out of bounds to everybody. In that room my mother "put-up" mead, for the four cups of wine required for the "seder" (the festive meal eaten on the first 2 nights of Passover,) that used to be made from sugar, honey and hops which after being mixed together was left to ferment. That was the first step in getting ready for Pessach.

The next step was getting the "Matzah "(the unleavened bread), which were being baked in Shereshev. There were 3 approaches to it; the most common was that a dozen or so women used to get together and bake it for themselves in one of their homes with the largest bake oven. This entailed making not only the oven and kitchen Kosher for Passover, but most of the house so that the Matzah should not come in contact with anything unleavened. The second approach was when a group of women used to get together to bake for others so as to earn enough for themselves. The third was the simpliest which only the better to do housewives could afford. Namely to hire those women to bake for them and that was how my mother used to do.

Every house in Shereshev had a bake oven, the large majority of women baked their own bread, but even the few dozen Jewish households, like ours, that did not bake bread, baked Challah for Shabbat. The oven came in handy to cook the traditional Shabbat meal, the "Tsholant." The bakers of course, had the largest ovens.

Not far from us on the main street, "Mostova", was a bakery owned by a widow Sarah Neibrief, from whom those organized Matza bakers used to rent out the kitchen, the living room, and a room or two in between, clean it to make Kosher for Passover, and set up an "Enterprise."

A long table was put in the living room around which a dozen or so women stood, their hair wrapped with white clean kerchiefs, to make sure that not a single hair falls in or on anything that has to do with the "Matza." Each of them with a wooden roller in hand is rolling a piece of dough into a layer of dough about a foot across. One woman nearby stands bent over a small trough kneading a piece of dough making a large piece called "Moire" just big enough to be cut up in pieces to go a round to each woman around the table, not less or more. When the chunk of dough is ready to be divided up, the woman kneading the dough pinches off a piece of dough so called "Nemen Challah" and gives it to the man so called "Sheeber" who stood in front of the open oven door in which a constant high intensity wood fire is burning. His job is to put in the raw matzah into the oven and take out the just baked ones. A constant job in front of a furnance like openening. The man takes the piece of dough and throws it in the fire. It is only after this that the "Moire" is cut up and divided among the women, to make Matzah from it.

The "Sheeber" is being handed the Matzah from the "Redler" whose function is to puncture holes in the raw Matza which is being done by rolling a pizza-like cutter with points on the edge back and forth over the Matza keeping a straight line with the help of a rolling pin held against it.

The baking of the Matza used to take place in the evenings as most of the women were married with families and were busy during the day with their own housework.

For us children it was a stimulating and interesting time of year. The excitement of those evenings, the "To-Do", the bustle to watch as it all takes place, to be permitted to carry on a rolling pin the raw matza from the table to the kitchen were the finishing process takes place, that is the carrying from the rollers to the hole puncturer, seeing the matza passing from him to the one at the oven how nimbly he handles the raw matza putting them into the oven and taking the baked ones out.

Matza for one household was baked in one evening, regardless of the amount and carried by the family members home late at night in extra specially washed white bed sheets.

Traditionally one is not permitted to taste matza before Pessah, but grown ups pretended not to see as we children used to sneek a

piece of matza,carrying it home and eat it on the way. It tasted much better than during Pessach.

We used to bring in the matza into the very same room as where my mother kept the fermenting mead, cover it tightly, not to be touched or even looked at until Pessach eve.

The only other item that was waiting for Pessach from way back was goose fat. Which used to be prepared from about Chanukah.(The eight day holiday commemorating the purification of the temple of Jerusalem by the Maccabees.) My mother used to order a goose from a local Jewish man who among other things used to supplement his meager income buy fattening geese for the well to do housewives. It was called not fattening but stuffing geese which it literally was. The geese used to be kept all summer in the swampy meadow where they ate their fill of rich vegetation and plant roots. In late fall they were brought indoors where the owner, his wife and children used to soak in wam water stale bread bought from the bakers for next to nothing. Mix it with bran and make from that heavy clay-like mixture long twists. Breaking those twists in 2-3 centimeter long pieces, holding the head of the goose with one hand and with the second forcing the peak open, they used to push a lump of that dough down the goose's throat.

I can still see that man holding the beak shut with one hand, with the other leading a visible lump in the goose's long neck down into its body.

This kind of forced feeding used to last 2 weeks or more. Right after Chanukah those geese were slaughtered by the "Shoichet" (Jewish ritual slaughterer) and were sold and delivered to the local housewives.

It might sound unbelievable, but such an average goose used to fetch some 3 kilograms of fat. It was cooked in Passover dishes, the meat eaten then, but the fat kept for Passover.

There were some housewives that bought a couple of geese, the fat of one kept for Pessach, and the fat of the second eaten during the winter which was the case in our household.

In an era of no refrigeration, no ice boxes, the goose fat kept in the cellar perfectly fresh, smelling and tasting as if it was just made.

Having provided us with 3 of a half a dozen or so main elements needed for Pessach, my mother turned to getting the house ready. Fortunately, our house was too new to have had the opportunity to accumulate the heaps of miscellaneous items un needed and unwanted but

that a houshold tends to accumulate and hates to part with, like all other households in Shereshev.

Still, the cleaning of even a new house for Pessach represented a formidable task. The very washing the windows in our house, the only house in town with double and permanent windows, with the inside ones swinging inwards, and the outside ones outside, where a ladder was an absolute necessary due to the high foundation on which our house stood.

The maid, a young strong village girl used to come in very handy. The closer to Pessach, the more frantic the preparations became.

The variety of Pessach foods available now a days, was not in existence then, nor were there any means of refrigeration, so the food had to be prepared no more than a couple of days before the holiday. An important part of the Passover diet consisted of matza-meal and matzo-farfel of which neither was available in a ready made form, and had to be made before Pessach by the man of the house. In our case, by my father and when I turned 12 or 13, I, too, pitched in.

Half a dozen matzas were thrown into a large mortar made from a tree stump and ground with the help of a heavy wooden pestle, some of whom had metal knobs at either end to faciliate the grinding or rather the stumping.

After a steady 10 or 15 minutes of hard stumping, most of the matzah in the mortar used to turn powdery. After sifting it, the powdery part was used as matza-meal and the bit larger ones as matza-farfel.

As I mentioned before, those 2 items, matza-meal and matza-farfel, were very much in demand during Pessach. Therefore, the men folks of the Jewish Shereshev spent the evenings before Pessach at home contributing their part to the holiday. When we boys use to go out for a walk in those evenings, by passing the Jewish homes, one could hear the dull stumping and reverbration from the matza grinding proprietors who were pitifully working at this back breaking task as if G-d wanted them to taste the slavery of their fore fathers in Egypt.

There was available a manufactured in Pruzany matza. It used to come in 2 kilogram packages, a square and softer kind, which I preferred. It was more expensive than the locally made ones and many households could not afford it.

How the housewives of Shereshev felt the couple weeks before Pessach I don't dare to think even. I know how the men folk felt, all

the more so the women. Still I know that everybody looked forward to the Pessach with anticipation, hope and joy.

It was a t radition, almost a "Must", to get a new suit for Pessach, of course, for those who could afford, particularly boys. Some parents who could not afford new suits for their sons, used to take their sons Shabbat suits to the tailor, and had them turned inside out, which made them appear new, that is if the boy did not grow too much over the past year. In any case, it was good for a younger brother.

The women attire, I won't describe, I am no expert now and certainly was not one then. What I remember well is, that I used to put on a new suit, and new shoes for Pessach. The trick was to have it ready for "Shabbat-Agodol" (the Saturday before Pessach), and to show off the new clothes in the synogogue. Who was equal to us boys as we paraded through the streets in our new outfits.

The day before Pessach eve, the house was all clean and Kosher for the holiday. The last couple food articles like meat and eggs that were being bought at that time by the grosse in contrast to the usual dozens at any other time of the year.

I recall my parents buying 3 gross eggs for Pessach, an unbelievable and exaggerating-sounding amount, but a correct one, were the last food items coming into the house before the holidays.

That evening the bath house was reserved for the women of the community. It also served as the community's ritual bath. That evening the head of the household (the men) went through the ceremony of "Bedikath-Khometz" (the traditional ceremonial search for leavened bread).

The next morning it was the men's turn to go to the bath-house, in our case my father and I.

The bath-house was the property of the Jewish community, an integral part of any small Jewish community in Eastern Europe and was used by the Jewish population only. I used to wonder where the non-Jewish population of Shereshev bathed, for there was no public bath-house in our shtetl and there were no bathing facilities in any home. In fact as far as I know we were the only ones in Shereshev with a tin bath-tub. There might have been a few wooden ones. Not that a bath at home was such a simple thing. It entailed bringing a dozen pails of water from the well and heating it over the wood-burning stove. It was much easier to go to the bath-house which was open every Thursday night for women and Friday mornings for men.

For the record I'll mention that the tin bath-tub as well as the Passover mortar and pestle was passed on to us from my grandparents, my mother's parents Leizer-Bear and Freida-Leah Auerbach.

The story of the bath-tub is as follows; My mother being the youngest child and the only girl, was not surprisingly, treated better than the boys. When she turned ten or so, her mother being over-protective, decided that the local bath-house is not clean enough for her only daughter and bought her a bath-tub for her own use.

The bath-house was in a small street by the name of "Shull-Gesl." Once inside one was confronted by a large furnace with a large gaping opening always ready to take in large chunks of wood which the attendant, Jankel Der-Bedder, was feeding it between his constant pumping the water and collecting the entrance fee. Jankel was a tall, well built man of whom my father used to say that he would have been a strong-man had he had a decent meal once in awhile.

The bath-house was divided into two parts. One forming the bath-house itself and the second part was the "Shvitz" (steam-bath). In the bath-house was the "Mikvah" (pool for ritual immersion laid out, floor, steps and walls with tiles,) and half a dozen tubs. Each connected separately to cold and hot water and a row of as many overhead showers.

It used to happen that one had to wait for a tub, but never too long. The Jews of Shereshev did not know how to relax in a tub, especially when others were waiting their turns. Some used to get into the second part the

"Shvitz," where mostly older Jews used to lay on wooden benches amidst thick steam and rub or massage each other's back with the help of short brooms made from young birch twigs.

My father was not a steam-bath enthusiast and maybe that's why neither am I. We used to shower after the bath and that was it. Some older Jews used to immerse in the Mikvah as the last act of cleansing.

After the bath, about ten in the morning we used to go home and eat together the last "Chometz"(leavened) meal up to after "Pessach", which consisted of fresh baked Challah, just brought from the bakery and milk. What ever was not consumed had to be thrown out. It was eaten in a hurry standing at the kitchen door leading to the outside or in one of the wood sheds.

After that meal we children used to take the wrapped-in-cloth wooden spoon with the bread crumbs from the "Bedikath Chometz" of the night before and take it to the bath-house where we used to throw it into the flaming furnace, by it fulfilling the command of "Beeur Chometz" (burning of the leavened.)

The day of Pessach Eve was a difficult day for all, in particular the women who had to prepare the "Sayder Meal" (festive Passover meal). To ease the long wait for the Seder Meal , my mother used to serve a snack consisting of peeled potatoes and hard boiled eggs. It was not the fanciest snack one could wish for but the only not leavened and not Passover, not dairy and not meaty food, which we are allowed to eat that day and was available in Shershev.

Finally the sun began to set. One could feel the festive atmosphere in shtetl. The Jewish homes were spic and span and so were its inhabitants. The women folk began to light the holiday candles and the men in their new or best attire began to make their way to the synagogues of which there were six in Shereshev. Besides the ancient Shul, which stood partly behind our house and was already beyond repair. Next door to the right of our house stood the so-called "Der Groyser Beys-Medrosh" (the large synagogue), which indeed was the largest in shtetl. A two-story brick building of which the second floor served as "Ezras-Noshim" (women's section), and the rest of the second floor gave extra height to the sanctuary.

The second synagogue the so-called "The Rabbis Synagogue" where my grandfather, Leizer-Bear Auerbach was the "Gabbi" (trustee or warden) up to his demise and where my father had his "Shtodth" (membership seat) at the eastern wall.

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The third "Reb Isaac's" synagogue, where my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel was a member. The fourth "The Gemoyerter" (built of bricks) was an ancient building made of over sized bricks looked as if built the same time as the ancient stately synagogue hundreds of years earlier. For us children the main attraction of that synagogue were its interconnecting cellars, whose layout we have never figured out. The fifth , the "New Synagogue" in the "Hoyf-Ghesl" (court alley) was indeed the newest. Built right after the first world war. Finally the last synagogue called the "Chassidic Synagogue" although in my time there were no Chassidim in Shereshev except for one family that moved in shortly before the second world war. Still one could find prayer books with a Chassidic version in Shereshev. Even we had some Chassidic prayer books in our house given to us by my paternal grandparents without any explanation.

After the short holiday eve prayer my father and I walked swiftly home where everything shone with holiday brightness and splendor from the floor to the ceiling including all items as well as the members of the household. The big table stood in the middle of the dining room covered with seven table clothes according to tradition one on top of the other, the best on the very top. The flames in the shining holiday candlesticks flickered happily and the joy and warmth filled every corner of the house. In the middle of the table was the "Kharra" (platter for the Passover night ceremony), prepared before we left for the synagogue. All the symbolic food on it was made by my mother except for the "Kharoset"(a mixture of fruit, nuts, spices and wine used at the Passover ceremony as a symbol of the mortar the Hebrews made in Egypt), which the Shereshev inhabitants used to obtain from the Rabbi Noah Liwerant. It was an old tradition in shershov to go to the rabbi's house for "charoset" and at then same time to sign the "mecheerat chometz" (selling of the chometz). Each member of the community used to leave the rabbi something, supposedly for selling the chometz to a non-Jew, as little as 20 groshi (pennies) or as much as 5 "zloty", depending on the financial situation of the contributor. I know that my father was one of the big donors.

This Passover eve contribution was of great financial assistance to the Rabbi. It brought him a couple months income. The only other income the Rabbi had was the selling of yeast on Thursday nights to the local Jewish housewives for baking challah for Shabbat.

Never-the-less he seemed to be getting by on his income for he managed to raise 5 children of which 3 attended the gimnaziam in the nearby district town of Pruczany.

We used to come home hungry from the synagogue on Pessah eve after that day's light lunch and did not waste any time in preceding with the "Sedar" which was conducted in an Orthodox tradition. The food was always good but never as good as the first Pessach night when we used to eat more than our fill and continue throughout the eight days until after the holidays.

The next morning all the men used to go to the synagogue. For us boys a time to show off our new clothes. Saturdays and holidays, the Hebrew school was closed, so we boys spent the time of Pessach playing games using walnuts, the most expensive nuts around and a loss of a couple was a big loss for a little boy.

The few days of the most beautiful Jewish holiday of the year used to pass quickly and on the last day after the evening prayers we used to start putting away the Passover dishes, a function in which the whole family participated. Each according to his or her age, wrapping the dishes, pots and pans in old newspapers and packing it tightly in wooden barrels. It was my father's job to carry it up to the attic where it remained untouched until the next year.

As soon as the Passover dishes were put away, my mother used to send me or my sister Sheva to the baker, who was just then taking out freshly baked rolls from the oven and the "Chometz" (unleavened) hungry crowd was buying them as if they had not eaten in a week.

The next morning everybody returned back to the ordinary and mundane life of the schtetl.

As Shereshev was almost entirely surrounded by forest in many a summer Saturday afternoons, after the "Cholent" (a Saturday dish), we boys used to go wandering or exploring the nearby woods. Our favorite place was a small wood a kilometer out of the court-lane. We used to call it the Alder-woods. It wasn't much of a forest, no more than a square kilometer which was constantly struggling for its territory, for it was being infringed from one side by a thick pine forest and from the other side by the nearby ever present swamps.

The forest was always mucky if not out right wet and over grown with all kinds of weeds and vegetation. All this was covered with a canopy of Alder bushes and trees. There, as children we had the opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the diversity of the bird kingdom in our part of the world. In that thicket, we could observe the birds laying their eggs up to the time the hatchlings used to leave the nest.

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Another place where we did spend a lot of time to observe birds, used to be the Jewish cemetery on the "Bet-Chayim" Street called "Nowa" Street in Polish. There in the old part of the cemetery over grown thickly with ancient trees, climbing among the dense branches we used to come across many bird nests, some were empty but some with birds eggs or young chicks.

We used to come back often to watch their progress, until one day we used to come back to find the nest empty, they had flown the coop.

In mid summer my mother gave birth to a girl, my youngest and third sister, whom my parents name Liba, after my grandfather Lazar-Bear Auerbach, who died in November the previous year. That was the fifth child to my parents and the third girl.

Before the school year in spring of 1933 ended, a rumor spread over the school and in schtetl that the principal of our Hebrew school, I. S. Peker of whom I have spoken earlier that he had a revisionis-zionistic outlook or conviction, is going to set up a Baitar cell, that is to organize a Baitar organization in Shereshev. This movement was hardly known in schtetl and it was doubtful if it would find any followers. It turned out however, that there were some young men who sympathized with this approach to Zionism.

Until then there were only left leaning Zionist organizations as Hashomer, Hashomer Hatzair and Hachalutz. Now there was also a middle of the road a more bougeois a more acceptable to the diverse masses of the Zionist Jewish population who did not look for guidance to Poland's neighbor to the east. The Jews of Shereshev remembered them from year 1920.

Every child from 9 years and older could join the organization. Understandably, almost every child in our school joined, knowing that the principal decided to set it up before the new school year starts.

This organization continued to grow, especially the last couple of years before the war, when the local Polish police dissolved the leftist Zionist organization accusing it of communist tendencies.

The organizer of the revisionist organization left Shereshev before the start of the school year and gave over the command to a young local man who was book keeper in the local Jewish community owned bank. His name was Chaim Shemesh, who also happened to be my father's first cousin from the mother's side.

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That Chaim was an exceptionally gifted person who from his childhood used to sit assiduously day and night over books and there was no limit to his quest for knowledge.

Chaim was the ideal person to take over the leadership of the Beitar, but it didn't last long. A few months later he succeeded in obtaining a much coveted permit to go the land of Israel then Palestine. His position was taken over by another local young man a just graduate from teachers seminary and just acquired a teacher's position in Shershev, Yaakov Yudelewsky.

The summer 1933 went by fast thanks to the activities in the hall(local) of Beitar where we used to come together to the so called assemblies where we used to be indoctrinated with the ideal and spirit of revisionism. Frequent outings out of town, our favourite place was the "Court-Lane". It was a short street of some 7-8 hundred metres long branching off west wards off the main street Mostowa. A the beginning of the lane to the left was a large space used for sport activities, behind it was the new synagogue followed by two or three farm homesteads. To the right, behind a shoe maker, lived a government functioneer followed by a large yard with a stately home in which lived the Greek orthodox priest with his nine beautiful daughters. Next to it was the Polish public school with it's sprawling grounds followed by the parsonage of the Catholic Church.

The main attraction of the Court-Lane were the two rows of ancient Linden trees one on either side of the lane. They were old to the extend that the trunks were empty inside and as boys three or four of us could squeeze inside the hollow trunks on the ground level. The row of trees ended before two perpendicular ditches, one on either side of the road, wide and deep thickly overgrown with vegetation and weeds.

The road itself continued farther beyond the ditches into the farmers fields where it often happened that while plowing the farmers used to uncover single oversized bricks or even reveal entire layers.

A partial answer to this mystery of the lane lies in it's name "Court-Lane". This story, may be part legend which corresponds with Polish history goes as follows; Several hundred years ago when Poland united with Lithuania and became a great power as they used to say from sea to sea, that is from the Baltic sea to the Black sea there was a queen (by marriage)of Italian descent by the name of "Bona". The queen built a palace in Shershev at the end of that lane and it was then that the Linden trees were planted leading from the main street to the palace. In order to separate the palace

from the town she ordered to dig those two ditches, and maybe those ditches served partly as moatse.

One day as her two daughters went walking into town they were attacked by a swarm of bees. Fortunately the Jews from the nearby houses noticed it and saved the two young princesses from much suffering and maybe death. In gratitude the queen built for the Jewish community a magnificent synagogue which remained one of the most impressive synagogues in Poland up to the first World war when it burnt down.

It is worth while to describe it more extensively which I hope to do later on.

This then "Court-Lane" served as the amusement park for the Jews of Shershev, especially on Saturdays when the Jewish crowd used to walk there under the wide shades of the linden trees or lay on the lush green grass under it. There, we, young teenagers spent many hours listening to the preaching and lectures of our young idealistic leaders, playing children's games and dreaming of the future.

That end of August I started grade four where we were introduced to a couple new subjects; "Chumosh"(Pentateuch), "Tanach"(Bible). The above two subjects we had been taught up to then but in an abbreviated form. We were also introduced to geography of the land of Israel, then Palestine.

While to the other subjects I remained indifferent, I became obsessed with the land of Israel, a subject of which my mother used to say; "wake him up in the middle of the night and he will tell you how many cows there are in each Kibutz." Not only did I get absorbed in it's geography but with the ideal of Zionism as well.

The teacher of that subject was Joel Waldshan who had a son Yaakov in my class. A year later when the principal, Peker, left Shershev Joel Waldshan replaced him as principal of the Hebrew school.

I don't think I will exaggerate if I'll state that I owe it to him, the teacher Waldshan, my awareness of being a Diaspora Jew, my commitment to Zionism and my desire to help build a Jewish home in the land of Israel.

Shortly after he started teaching us about Israel and it's geography he acquainted us with every town, settlement and kibutz there. Considering the number of towns, settlements and kibutzim in Israel in 1933, it wasn't too difficult for a young and inquisitive mind to absorb it all and it is no wonder that after so many years I still remember something.

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Shortly after the above mentioned subject was introduced to us, we started a project called "50 years of building". The project refereed to the 50 years of rebuilding of the Jewish home land from 1882-1932. The teacher took us through those 50 years as if we were living side by side with those early pioneers. Their hardships, hunger and thirst, their defeats and victories, their disappointments and enthusiasm and above all their dreams and their boundless hopes.

Despite the fact that my fate brought me to Canada, those dreams of my youth have stayed with me ever since.

It is well over sixty years since those lessons, but I can still see that teacher, Joel Waldshan, standing in front of his class, a group of ten year olds telling us with so much fervor the accomplishments, daring and heroism of those Chalutzim(pioneers). As they stay neck deep in malaria infested swamps to plant Eucalyptus trees and dig ditches in order to drain and dry the swamps to make it useable. Or as they stay at night on guard to protect the newly established tender kibutzim from sudden murderous Arab attacks. As Jewish young people and juveniles in eastern Europe leave behind warm homes and families and set out to a far and hostile land, exposing themselves to all kinds of dangers and difficulties in order to build a Jewish home.

My exuberant imagination use to get hold of me and I could barley wait for the day when I'll be of age and be able to join the ranks of the "Chlutzim"(pioneers) to participate in building of the land of Israel.

The exercise book which we used for the subject of the geography of Israel was the heaviest I have ever used. As we learned about each town, settlement or Kibutz we had to paste in pictures which we used to cut out from newspapers, booklets or pamplets of those particular places we were learning at that time. The more pictures we had, the better. My oncle Eli, my fathers youngest brother was very active in "Hashomer-Hatzoir" and had access to a lot of printed material about Israel. Through him I had an unexhaustable source of pictures.

It is no wounder that mine was one of the two outstanding exercise book in class. The second belonged to Yaakov Waldshan, the teacher's son.

One day close to "Rosh-Hashana" (Jewish New Year) 1933, coming to visit my grandmother Freida-Leah Auerbach I noticed between her mail that just arrived an open "Shono-Tova" (Jewish New Year Card) which had on it the pictures of the Western Wall, the tomb Stone of Rachel and the tomb of the Patriarchs. It was good material for pasting in my

exercise book. Without thinking I said to my grandmother; "Bobe, kenst mir gebn der Shono-Tova" meaning ; can you give me this New Years Card. She answered; "Yeh mine kind, do kenst hobn der Shono-Tova un mine gout yor oich" meaning; you can have this card and the good things destined for me too. To a ten year old sickness is far from mind and death is unthinkable, but to a ten year old a person in the seventies is a very old person. Why would my grandmother want to give me at her old age the good things destined for her?

At that moment I felt as if I am depriving her of something or better yet as if she is giving me the most precious thing she has, namely her fair state of health in her old age. I wished she would not have said it, knowing her love and devotion I knew she meant every word she just said and I wanted her to have it.

"Rosh-Hashana" was approaching and so was "Yom Kippur" the so called "Yomim Norahim" (days of awe). Already a month earlier at the beginning of the month of "Ellul" (the Jewish name of the last month of the year). One could feel a sence of solemnity in the air which grew in intensity by the day. The Jews of Shershev felt indeed that the day of Judgment or reconing is approaching. It was not just imaginary nor a presuption but a very real "This day we will stand in judgment". People were calmer, spoke politer and the attendence in the synagogue increased daily.

Avrom-Bear, the chimney-sweep, an old Jew who's job it was to go aroung the Jewish streets Friday and all other holidays before sunset and yell in a loud voice"In Shul Arayin" meaning; go to the synagogue. This was the signal for the Jewish stores to close, for the Jewish workers and artisans to stop work and for the women to light the Shabath candels. In the month of Ellul he used to go around the Jewish streets between two and three in the morning knocking on doors and shutters shouting "Get up for Slychot" (penitence prayers). Jews used to get up early every morning and go to the synagogues. I will admit that the majority that used to go were older men.

That chimney sweep use to go around all the Jewish homes every Thursday and get a donation for performing that "Sacred work" which consisted ofbetween 10-20 groszy from a well to do member or from 1-2 groszy from a poor member who's family was starving themselves.

Besides this function, Avrom-Bear was the only chimney-sweep in Shershev.

This old Jew, through all his years, used to climb on every roof in Shtetl, with a small broom stuck on a long thin stick in his hand

positioning himself beside the chimney jamming in the broom into the chimney and used to push it all the way down to the stove below. Having repeated it several times he used to climb down and empty the stove below of all the soot that came down from the chimney. Yet with all of his effort he was as poor as they come having to support a wife, a son and a daughter, both of whom were passed the marriegeable age for Shershev.

Their only benefit he could derive from his profession was the fact that his beard was always black and nobody has ever seen his face even an a holiday.

Even this Avrom-Bear used to lower his voice before the "Days of awe" which must have been difficult for him, for I believe that he really forgot to speak in a normal voice. As far as I remember his voice always thundered from one to the other end of the Shtetl.

People made do with less gossip which was quite popular, after all we had to have something or somebody to talk about. In short people bewared from "every forbidden thing".

We, that is my little brother "Liova"(Leibl) and I used to go with our father to the synagogue. The floor of the synagogue, as I mentioned earlier used to be covered with hay during the "Days-of-Awe". Fortunatly, some old men used to remain over night to pray and to watch out for the burning candles otherwise I'm sure the synagogue would catch on fire.

For those "Days-of-Awe" the membership used to arrange for a better " Bahal-Tefilah" (a person who leads in the prayer) and not settle for some of our own volunteer members. They preffered Yankel Kleinerman or Tzalke Fun-Di-Zamden (from the sand-duns) or Bendet Lifshtz who had better voices.

Understandably that such "Bahalay-Tefilah" did not come for free and the entire treasury of the synagogue had to be emptied for such a pleasure which could cost as much as five dollars.

After the short "Rosh-Hashona" eve prayer the congregants used to wish each other a "Shana-Tova" (a good year) and without the customary short chat, go home. The welcoming greeting coming home was always "Leshona Tova Tikotaivu" (may you be inscribed for a good year), Never a hint of a holiday.

After the "Kidush" (blessing on the wine) we used to sit down to the "Rosh-Hashana" eve meal which always used to start with golden chicked soup with noodles. The noodles my mother used to say is very traditional as a reminder of our long lasting "Galut" (exile). This dish

used to be followed by fish, meat, with "Kreplach" (fritters stuffed with meat) and other dishes, but never anything sour or bitter.

The "Rosh-Hashana" used to be spent between the house and the synagogue. We boys used to go to the river and watch the crowd of worshipers that used to gather for "Tashlich" (the ceremony of casting the sins).

The ten days of "Tshuva" (Repentence)use to pass in a very subdued mood. The day before "Yom-Kipur" early in the morning all members of the family used to "Shlogen Kaporot" (traditional sacrificial ceremony the day before "Yom-Kippur"). The men with the cock and the women with a hen. Shortly after, it was my task to take the fowls to the "Shochet" (ritual slaughterer) who lived on the "Bet-Chaim" street.

The slaughterer, an older respectable man, stood on the porch in his back yard, wrapped in a blood stained apron, a long thin knife in one hand, takes with his other hand the receipt which I got from his wife or daughter coming into the house for the twenty "groshy" slaughtering fee for each fowl. After putting the receipt in a little box near by he leads the nail of his thumb over the length of the sharp edge of the knife to make sure that there is no adhesion on the knife. (It is a requirement by Jewish law to make the slaughter of animals or fowls as painless as possible).

After this inspection with a quick slash he cuts the fowls neck and throws it down to the ground below. Not losing a second he turns to the next customer. The just slaughtered fowl used to try even to fly in it's lasts seconds of agony. It didn't last more that 10-15 seconds before they were dead. I and others used to pick up the fowl and take them home where they used to be prepared for the meals before and after the fast.

About three in the afternoon the men used to go to the synagogue for the afternoon prayers. Right inside the synagogue at the entrance, they used to put down a large table on which there were a dozen or more large plates containing signs indicating the name of the charitable organization or purpose for which the alms are being collected. For example: right infront was the plate for the synagogue, next for the beadle, for the local free-loan-institution, visiting the sick, burial associations and others.

Besides the above there were out of town plates like Jewish national fund, Keren hayesod, keren-tel-chai, yeshivot and for poor locals, the neediest of all. One had to come with some change in his pocket. The saddest part was that most of the attending worshipers could use it themselves. Of course each worshiper had his own prefered charity which he used to favor more generously then the others.

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The traditional candels that we light on "Yom-Kippur" today in memory of the departed were not the short and stubby ones of today, they were waxen candles 60 centimetres long, 5 centimetres at the bottem and 3 centimetres on top. They were lit not at home but in the synagogue right after the "Mincha" prayers on "Yom-Kippur" eve and used to burn untill after "Yom-Kippur" , that is after dark the following day.

Almost all worshipers used to bring with them cadles, one for each departed. Thus the synagogue was full of huge lit candles that use to contribute more to the already suffocating conditions of the crowded synagogue. As a result many of the candles used to start melting and bending.

After the afternoon prayers they used to have the meal before the fast which always started with chicken soup and noodles. My mother use to make sure that the food is not salty so that we should not be thirsty during the fast.

For "Kol-Nydray" (main and opening prayer of the eve of theDay of Atonment) and the followingYom-Kippur day all of the Jewish population in Shtetl used to be in the synagogues, except for the Bed-Ridden. It was a tempting time for the not so honest none Jewish elements in Shtetl not to try to open a door or a window of a Jewish home knowing that none of the people are home.....

As the form of the prayers in Shtetl was in all the synagogues the same, the worshipers used to sing alond with the "Chazan" (Cantor) and my father use to make sure that I participate. As a substantial part of the "Yom-Kippur" prayers are in aramaic and dispite the fact that at that time I already could converse in Hebrew, I did not understand those prayers fully and my father used to interprete them for me.

I beleive that my father had a gift for languages, for there were no Hebrew schools in Shershev in his youth and in a "Chaider" (traditional religious school) they did not use the spoken Hebrew, yet my father was fluent in Hebrew. The same applies to Polish even though my father grew up under the Czar where the study of Polish was unavailable. He kept repeating to me ; read and understand what you are reading

"Nehila" (closing service of the day of Atonement) time was a diffecult time for the fasting crowd, firstly because of the solemnity of the hour and secondly due to the total exhaustion at the end of the long fast. After the closing prayer the "Ghabay" (trustee of the synagogue) with some older members use to go outside to see if there are three stars visible in the evening sky. When they appeared they used to finish the day with "Maariv" (evening prayer) and then blow the "Shoifar" (ram's horn) after which the

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worshipers used to answer with a loud "Leshono Abo B'yerusholoim" (next year in Jerusalem).

Worshipers hurriedly use to wish each other by saying the words "Gmar-Chatimo-Toivo" (may you be sealed for a good year) and hurry home.

My mother and sister Sheva use to leave the synagogue right after "Nehilo" and go home to get the feast ready which traditionally use to start for my father with a small glass of Vodka and a piece of "Lekach" (honey cake).

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"Sukkot" (the feast of tabernacles) was a long and pleasant holiday which used to usher in the beginning of the winter. It might sound strange but as far as I remember the first frost used to come "Chol-Amoed" (intermediary-weekdays) of "Sukkot" and used to end the season of the "Zielonky" (a kind of green mushrooms) that appeared in late summer and dipappeared with the first frost. Gentiles used to put them in vinigar or marinate. Jews used to fry or cook them.

The time came to wear "Kaloshy" (short rubber boots worn over shoes or boots). They had to be taken off before walking into the school. In order to protect the wooden floors from rotting, they used to spray kerosine on the floor every month or so. The moment one stepped on the kerosine covered floor with the "Kaloshy" the bottoms of the "Kaloshy" began to blister and fall appart.

With the cold weather and short days, our activities became limited and we use to spend a fair amount of the evenings in the local of the Beitar where the time used to pass quickly with singing zionistic and contemporary songs, danding the "Hora" , discussions about zionistic and contemporary problems.

None of us could forget the early spring of 1933 when we heard grown-ups speaking of a man by the name of Hitler who gained power in Germany. I can still see the concerned faces of my parents and their friends speaking about it. A year later this name was on the lips of every Jew in Shershev as well as on every Jewish lips in Poland. At our meetings in the local Beitar this name

came up quite often as a Jew hater but not to the extend and the scale on which he turned out to be.

One of my favourite passtimes was reading books which I used to borrow from the Hebrew library school. The library consisted of some two hundred and fifty books mostly originally written in Hebrew but there were a few dozen that were translated into Hebrew from other languages. I would say that a good part of the library books I read before I left Hebrew school after finishing grade four.

There was also a "Yiddish" library in Shershev founded by a group of young people some ten years earlier. One of the founders and initiators of the idea was my cousin Abraham Auerbuch who in the year 1930 at the age of twenty married a local beauty by the name of Channa Maister and shortly after left for Argentina, leaving his young wife behind to stay with her parents until he will be able to bring her over.

It was he and some of his friends, none of them over the age of 18 that lay the foundation for creating a Yiddish library that has growm to several hundred books by the time my cousine left Shershev a couple years later.

Those young and idealistic individuals saw it as their duty to provide worldly reading material for a Jewish youth of Shershev that began slowly to move away from the "Chaider" tradition to a more modern educational system that began to expose them to new yet unknown horizons.

I'll come back to it later.

November used to bring with it the cold weathers but seldom any snow. Yet I remember an eleventh of November when there was snow on the ground as we paraded on that Polish Independance Day while the rest of Europe celebrated that day as armistice day. We, that is our Hebrew school and the Polish public school used to gather on the "Sport-Place" a large empty lot at the corner of the main street Mostowa and the "Court-Lane".

On this Sport-Place we used to be joined by the "Strzelcy" (a pre-military voluteer youth organization to which Jewish young men did not belong due to the prevailing in it anti-semitism. Jews had enough mental and phisical cruelty applied on them by their officers while serving the commpulsery two years in the Polish army.

We were also joined by another group of men the so called "Reserve", consisting of former Polish soldiers of the Catholic Faith, who with the awakening of Polish Nationalism became suddenly very patriotic. Jews or members of the Russian orthodox faith were not excepted, even though they constituted 80% of the local population.

When we were finally joined by the fire brigade in which the majority were Jews in their uniforms and bress helmets with their wind orchestra in front they begane to march toward the town center. There the orchestra used to strike up the Polish anthem and the public was subjected to a couple of speeches of the same contents that told and retold the bravery of the Polish legions in the first World War. The crowd use to applaud, listen once more to the anthem and disperce.

For the Polish government emploies including the Police that day was a good excuse to celebrate, often to excess.

The father of my two friends Laizer and Litek Rotenberg hailed from around the town of "Chelem" where he grew up on his father's estate and from where he brought an unexhaustible amount of stories which he shared with us boys during the long winter evenings. Some of the stories were from his childhood which was much different than ours. Some were true stories and some were fictions. Being a good story teller he could keep us boys hypnotized with his stories for hours. Many of his stories had to do with witches, ghosts and demons.

Living in a society were many grown ups believed in ghosts, we kids certainly were inclined to believe too. After listening with my friends to his stories for a couple of hours we used to go home on the dark night. My friends lived along the street where one could see an ocasional passer by at night. I lived across the dark and empty square where to one side of our house stood the large synagogue which at that time of evening was closed and enveloped in darkness. Behind our house some 20-25 metresstood the ancient synagogue all burnt out except for it's immense walls, imposing facade and with young birch trees overgrown roof. As the flat ceiling and the upper part was inaccessible to humans,birds and small animals made their homes there. At night one could hear strange voices coming from that ancient relic which were rumored to be of ghosts and demons that gather there at night.

As I was nearing the house I was also getting closer to the huge Shul and the sounds coming from there. The closer I got to the house, the closer to the sounds the more scared I used to get. The relief used to come the moment I used to get a hold of the doorhandle . The door used to get locked only when the last one in the family used to go to bed.

Preparations for "Channuka" (feast of the Maccabees) use to start in school a month before the festival. Each grade had it's part to preform and each teacher wanted to please and get the praise of the spectators. So instead of lessons a lot of time was taken up with rehearsals which were at times quite entertaining and to which the students did not object.

The performance used to take place on a "Channuka" Saturday night in the largest room were the stage was situated. The general public used to be invited, but the majority spectators were the parents of the students, especially the parents of the performers.

This performance use to remain a topic for conversation in Shtetl for weeks to come, not so much among the students as among the parents who could not stop raving about their childrens artistic qualities or among parents who felt offended by the insignificant part their children were assigned in the play, worse yet if a child was completly overlooked and had no part at all.

Traditionally on "Channuka"we kids used to receive from our parents so called "Channuka Gelt" ("Channuka" money). Not only from the parents but also from grandparents and even aunts and uncles if we happened to be there in the right time. It was not big money but more than we used to get from our parents in our daily allowance. We could also spend it on anything our hearts desired.

The J.N.F.(Jewish National Fund) supporters in Shershev were quite active. Young boys and girls used to go around weekly to Jewish homes with a list in hand to collect for J.N.F. and to make sure that the contributer doesnot reduce his or her contribution from last week.

There were of course many poor Jews who could not afford to contribute anything and in order not to embarras them the collecters used to by pass their homes.

Our Hebrew school under the name of "Bet-Saifer- Yavnah- Al- Yad- Tarbut" had it's own method of collecting money for J.N.F. From the central office of the J.N.F. in Warsaw, they use to get little booklets of ten- twelve pages. On each page there was a map of a certain part of the land of Israel, like the upper galilee, lower galilee, the valley of Jezrael, the valley of Sharon and so on. Each page was divided by lines into squares of three centimetres across. Each student use to receive a booklet and his or her assignment was to cover each page with three centimetre across J.N.F. stamps that use to cost five "Groshy" each. One needed a dozen stamps to fill up a page and ten times as much to fill up the booklet. A lot of money for some youngsters who didn't get more then five "Groshy" a week spending money.

Considering that five "Groshy" could get you a chocolate bar or a handful of candy or a packet full of pumkin or sunflower seeds. Some parents use to give their children five "Groshy" to buy on the way to school few grams of salami or "Halva" to have with the plaine black bread during the lunch break. Some of the kids use to give up the delicacy and settle for dry bread alone in order to buy a stamp so as to sooner fill up the maps in the booklet.

A substantial part of my sister Sheva's and my money use to go for those stamps.

How much we children, speaking for my sister and myself and I am sure for many others, felt affection, commitement and dedication to the ideal of zionism and the land of Israel, is now that the dream is realized, difficult to comprehend.

The willingness or even concept of self sacrifice for Israel among many of the diaspora Jewish youth in those days, I am afraid, is a thing of the past.

The importance of collecting money for the above mentioned purpose was not left only to school children and their teachers. Young people, teenagers and older use to organize evening entertainement for the purpose of raising money for J.N.F.

The main project used to be the so called "Bazar". That was a week long festival that use to start with a "Purim-Ball" and indeed lasted a whole week. Working people did not spend late evenings there but the young and the not working ones use to spend most of their time there. The dancing use to take place in the

large room in our school. In fact the entire school used to be emptied for this purpose, suspending lessons for a whole week.

We children use to go home for a few hours of sleep and eat, spending the rest of the time at the "Bazar". It was the only time of the year when parents did not tell their children when to be home and we could come and go as we pleased.

For the first, the opening evening, they use to bring an orchestra from Pruzany, consisting of half a dozen Jewish musicians useing wind-instruments. The other nights we used to be entertained by a few local amateur musicians playing string-instruments. They use to play for a much lesser fee not being professionals, nor did they have traveling expenses. After all the purpose of the "Bazar" was to raise money.

One classroom used to be converted into a modest cafeteria where one could buy tea, coffee and "Kvass" (a kind of a soft drink) to wash down the available light sandwiches, jelly-doughnuts and other kind of sweets. Another classroom use to serve as a store where on display one could find merchandise donated by the local store keepers. But mainly merchandise donated by manufacturers from across Poland.

I recall my father's youngest brother, Eli, who having come for weekends from high school in Pruzany, sitting and writing letters to Jewish manufacturers asking for contributions of their product to the "Bazar". In a sense their contribution was benificial to both parties. Firstly for us, their gratis merchandice after selling brought in aditional money for the "Bazar" and secondly the manufacturer got almost free advertising of his product or at least for a minimal price.

Here I like to mention that some firms and factories responded quite generously. Although the Jews of Poland lived in poverty, never-the-less there were among the three and a half million Jews of Poland some rich and warm hearted individuals who held fast to the ancient Jewish tradition of charity. Not to mention the fact that half of the Polish Jewry were active zionist.

With the establishment of the "Beitar" in Shershev was also organized a compain to raise money for "Keren-Tel-Chai" (fond for the revisionist organization). However when Jabotinsky quit the old established zionist organization and set up a new one, he lost temporary some of his supporters.

The fact that his sympathizers lost any chance of receiving a "certificate", that is a permit to go to the land of Israel, as the old leftist zionist organization remained the sole authority to dispose with those permits, affected negativly the will and strive of the public to come up with more substantial contributions. As a result the "Keren-Tel-Chai" never reached the level of becoming a serious competiter to the J.N.F.

My mother and my grandmother, Freida-Leah, both decided that my grandmother should move over closer to us. They found a room in a house belonging to a certain Chaya-Liba Shterman, one house away from our house. In the house between us and the Shterman's lived Nachman Feldman with his wife Tzinah and daughter Sarah. That Nachman was an upper-shoe-stitcher, in my time he wasn't working anymore but had a couple young apprentices working for him. Our two houses were seperated by a driveway that led to both our backyards. His house staying perpendicular to the market square, that is with the narrow side to it had infront an Haberdashery store. There was talk in Shtetl that the store was his daughters dowry.

Indeed shortly after, his daughter Sarah got married and remained living in the house with her parents, running the store while her husband Osher, a decent and pleasent young man whom Sarah's father Nachman found in the "Yeshiva" (talmudic academy) in Brest-Litovsk set in the house all day studying "Torah".

I doubt if he ever entered the store or knew what was going on in there. As far as I remember he set continuously over the holy books being waited upon by two women, his wife and his mother-in-law who were doing it with great love.

The main reason for my grandmother's moving nearer to us was her deteriorating health. Her new land lady Chaya-Liba Shternman was then a woman of about fifty, a widow who lived with her daughter Shaina of already marrageable age. Mother and daughter lived from a small yard-goods store which was in their half of a large house. The other half of the house belonged to Nechemya Der-Shteper (an upper shoe sticher) with his wife Rivka and three children. This Rivks was a daughter of my very first "Melamed" (teacher) when I wasn't yet five years old.

Thus we had our grandmother Freida-Leah very close to us, and my sister Sheva and I use to come in intermittently to

her, bringing with us food so she shouldn't have to cook herself even though she liked to do it.

From my father's side of the family there were in Shershev my grandparents Yaakov-Kopel and Chinka Kantorowicz who lived on the main street "Mostowa", later renamed "Pieraciego". With them lived their younger daughter Pola (Pesl), their second younger son Hershl and the youngest son Eli, who was nine years older then I.

Besides them my father had in Shershev another brother Reuben, some five years my father's junior. His wife Chashka (nee Pinsky). They had a daughter Michla two years my junior, a son Shalom born in 1928 and in the mid 30's were blessed with another baby boy whom they named Shevach after my father's older brother who parished in World War one and after whom my sister Sheva was named. Besides them my father had a sister Shaindl in near by Pruzany married to Leibel Pinsky who by the way was a brother to my aunt Chashka Kantorowicz. Both, Leibal and his wife Shaindl were born in Shershev but for my time lived in Pruzany.

My father also had a married brother in Pruzany, Joshua with his wife Mushkah, who gave birth to a son Shalom at about the same time as my brother Leibel(Liova) was born.

This Mushkah, nee Leshtchinsky, too was born in Shershev to Mordchai. It was from him that my father bought the store in the Rad-Kroman (row-of stores) in the market square in the year 1930. Mordchai Leshtchinsky used to sell yard goods in that store. After selling the premises he moved his merchandise to his house where he lived with his daughter Sarah-Esther whose time for marriage was long overdue. He continued to sell off his wares from his house.

Reb Mordchai, as he was known in Shtetl, was thus related to my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel by marriage. Having got rid of his store he use to come often to my grandfather's store to discus politics. He was an intelligent and well read man, charitable, respected and I would add the best dressed man of his age in Shtetl. I can't recall a time not having seen him in a suit, a freshly pressed white shirt and a matching tie.

In closing his chapter I'll add that he had the "Zchut-avot" (ancestral merit) to die in Shershev two days before the

expulsion of the Jewish community. The last Jew to come to "Kever-Israel" (a Jewish burial on a Jewish cemetery) in Sherhsev.

With this man Mordchai, my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel remained friends up to Mordchai's demise. It wasn't interrupted even after my aunt Mushkah died in 1934 when my uncle, her husband, Joshua had to take her for an operation to Stokholm, for there were no facilities nor doctors in Poland to perform such an operation.

My uncle Joshua remained a widower with two small children for a year and married a single girl from Pruzany, quite a few years younger then he by the name of Freida Goldfarb (Chayim Kubliners daughter) and they had two more children of their own before the war.

Going back some years I would like to point out that a mass emigration was taking place in Europe that started yet in the nineteenth century and took in all levels of the population regardless of nationality of religion, among them many Jews. The direction was over-seas, mainly the American Continent, in particular the United States.

After the first World War the gates of this country were partly closed, and the second best place became South America. The majority of the emigrants were poor people who worked hard to make a living or couldn't make one at all. Others felt that they can improve their standard of living somewhere else. Still others wanted to escape their mundane small town life and look for a more exciting a more promising and a more assured tomorrow. To this last category belonged my father's brother Shalom. From all my grandparents Kantorowicz's nine children he was the only one that left his birthplace to look for new horizons in the far away world. The place he choose was Argentina. I personally don't remember him but as long as I can remember I knew that my father had a brother in Argentina.

With the start of the great depression in 1929 and the few following years it became stylish in the so called civilized world to lean to the left, that is to be socialisticlly or communisticly inclined. A direct result of the difficult then times that prevailed in the world.

Idealisticly motivated young people in the industrial and partly industrialized world saw a solution to the problem

by helping to build a socialistic society, a workers paradise, in the existing soviet union.

Many of those young idealists made the terrible mistake of volunteering to go to the Soviet Union, among them was my uncle Shalom with his young bride Sarah.

In 1930 they left Buenos-Aires for the soviet Union. Somehow the road took them via Warsaw to where my father traveled on the quiet to meet him. The reason for my father's trip being secretive was twofold. Firstly: my father's brother was a Polish citizen and Poland was on bad terms with the soviets to the extend that the border was closed for Polish citizens and communists were being arrested and persecuted in Poland. Secondly, to meet someone traveling to the Soviet Union would make my father a suspect in the eyes of the Polish law. Not only him but the entire Kantorowicz clan.

My father did go to see him and it remained a secret for a long time. As soon as my grandparents received from him the first letter that they arrived in the Soviet Union my uncle's where-abouts was no more a secret. But my father's meeting him in Warsaw remained a secret.

The corespndance between them and my grandparents continued until 1933 when it suddenly stopped. The entire family became uneasy, for we knew in part the situation in the Soviet Union. Although part of the rumors were atributed to Polish anti-bolshevic propoganda we also knew that each person in the Soviet Union is walking a tight-rope.

Late in fall of 1933 a letter came from Shalom's wife not from the Soviet Union but from Argentina and it came to my parents and not to my grandparents. She deliberatly addressed it to us in order not to have to tell the sad news to her in-laws. She wrote that she gave birth to a baby girl in Biribijan and shortly after her husband passed away she with her three month year old baby returned to Buenos-Aires. Accuratly how he died Idon't know, it was never spoken about in the presence of us children. In my opinion it could have been one of two reasons: A sickness, fatal without proper medical attention or he fell victim to Stalin's terror.

My father and his brothers were not in a hurry to pass on such news to their parents. My grandmother, father's mother,had a premonition that something happened to her son and finally wrote a letter to her daughter-in-law's parents in Argentina

asking them for the anniversary of her son's demise. They, taking it for granted that she knew the truth, wrote her the date. My grandmother observed a full years mourning from the time she found out, thus being stricter in observance than required by tradition.

My father's two younger brothers being single and still living at home with the parents used to enjoy listening to music on their record player. In compliance with Jewish tradition my grandmother removed the arm of the record player thus preventing them from using it, so that no music shall be heard in the house for a year. She gave the removed arm to my father for safekeeping first extracting from him a promise not to return it to his brothers berfore the year is up.

With the demise of my father's brother Shalom, the only child or descendant of the nine children of my grandparents Kantorowicz, that got out of Europe before the war, the fate of the entire Kantorowitcz clan was destind to share the fate of the rest of European Jewry.

With early spring of 1934, Berl Gichman or rather his wife started selling off their last half-rotten apples from last fall. I think it is worth while telling this little story. Barl Gichman, his wife, his two sons Chayim-Todle and Moshe and their daughter Malkah lived a good distance behind their cousins house the brother's Isser and Faivel Gichman, right on the river bend. Giving the appearance that the house is in the Gichman brother's yard. In that yard with a wide gate to the street were a few large, as for Shershev warehouses, in which the Gichman brothers kept their wares. The wares consisted of rags which they used to buy from the couple dozen rag-men.

They, the rag-men, use to return home on Thursday evening or early Friday morning for Shabbat from their weeks business in the surounding villages. Coming into the Shtetl they used to drive their horse and buggy to the Gichman brothers yard with the rags which they succeded to get in the villages in barter for niddles, thread, drinking galsses, kitchen utensils, packet knives and alike. At times they used to bring bristle and horse hair which the Gichmans used to buy from them together with the rags. In the warehouse full of rags, filth and dust sat two permanent employies all day long sowing together by hand rags, making from them large bags and stuffing in them more rags or bristle and horse hair.

The stuffed bags used to be taken by horse and wagon to the railway-station Linovo-Onarczyce thirty kilometres away

The stuffed bags used to be taken by horse and wagon to the railway-station Linovo-Onarczyce thirty kilometres away and from there by train to Warsaw where the hair and bristle used to go to brush making factories and the rags to be made into fibre for new yard-goods.

In summer many women, Jews and non-Jews used to supplement their husbands income by picking blueberries and cranberries in season in the surrounding forest and selling it by the tea-glass in the street. However, most of them use to sell it to the Gichman brothers who use to send it off the same day to the larger centers.

Many men, but mostly boys use to go picking mushrooms, some for themselves but many used to dry them and sell them to the Gichman brothers who used to export them abroad.

I would like to mention that the two permanent employies of the Gichman brothers, mabye because they were so pure and wretched or maybe because they are among the millions whos names nobody is left to remember, I will mention. One middle age man Reuben Valdman, married with half a dozen children. One of his daughters was in my class in the Polish school. He was a tailer by trade, unfortunatly he also couldn't speak or hear from birth. In those days it was a much greater impediment then now a days. He could not get employment with other tailers nor could he get his own clients. The only job he could find was to sow rags into socks.

The other man was in his fifties. I doubt if anyone in Shtetl new his family name. His first name was "Avromkah", a singe man, short, stocky, with a short gray beard. He spent some years in the States and apparently due to his mentl illness was sent back to where he came from. In my time he lived in a small house on "Chazer-Gesl" (pig lane) that was owned by a widow woman with children. She, poor soul, needed the couple "Zloty" so badly that she let him have a tiny room that only a man five feet tall like Avromkah could stretch his full lengh on the floor in that room.

Still working all year round he could not exist on his pay and used to take off Thursday afternoon's to go around to the homes for alms.

When I got older and my father used to leave me alone to mind the store for a couple of hours during vacation time my friends used to join me. If it happened that this "Avromkah" used to come in for his weekly handout, for a few extra "Groshy" he used to sing

for us Jewish songs he brought from America. Songs like "Der Talisl" or "Aless Oif Steam" and others which I have since forgotten. Two wretched, poor things among many in Shtetl that nature, fate and humanity has wronged so much.

I like to go back to that Beril Gichman that lived at the river band behind the two Gichman brothers.

In the spring Beril Gichman used to rent a couple orchards from the surrounding large land-owners. It always represented a gamble, for if the harvest was a good one he could remain with a few "Zloty" to see him through the winter, but if not, his family went hungry all winter long.

In peoples opinion he couldn't win in any case. If the harvest was mediocra he some how managed to survive the winter, if poor he starved, but even when the harvest was a good one he was in trouble too. Normally he kept the fruits in the attic over the winter up to the early spring. Not having another place to keep it as his house had no cellar for it was to close to the river which used to flood every fall and spring covering even the floor of the house. So he was forced to sell the extra fruits in season for a very low price.

The attic was the only place where apples somehow survived the winter, not too cold to freeze and not to warm to spoil. Yet spoil it did. So almost every day he and his children used to pick over the apples taking out the started to rat ones to be sold first. As a result his wife used to spend every day of the week except for the Sabboth throughout the entire winter selling half rotten apples.

I will mention that in fall he did keep some apples and pears in the maze of sellers under the brick synagogue which was in the lane starting between my uncle Rueben and the Rabbies house in the market square

The first vegetable to appear was Shallot. The local farmers used to pinch off the green long stems and sell it by the bunch. The stems had to be open to make sure there are no little green worms in them, washed, cut into on centimetre long pieces, mixed thick with water, vinigar and sugar and was served as the first salad of the season to go with meat.

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Cherries

The first fruits of the season were the early cherries. A yellow cherry with no particular taste. A couple weeks later the real cherries appeared, dark red and sweet. Next in vegetables came lettuce, a week or two later small round radishes and one after another cucumbers, cauliflowers, still later the first carrots, tomatoes, beets and others.

There were no real coolers or freezers in Shereshev in those days, yet people had to keep those perishables for as long as possible.

As soon as the fruits appeared on the market brought in by farmers from the surrounding villages my mother started to provide and to store for the winter, beginning with cherries.

We had at home a little wooden barrel of some 30-35 centimetres in diameter and 60-65 centimeters in length lying on its side. It was given to us by my grandmother Auerbach when she sold her house after the death of her husband. To my recollection it was always full with fermenting cherries in sugar and vodka. It had a faucet on one side to let some of the delicious cherry-brandy out with which my grandmother Freida-Leah used to treat some of her special visitors. Through the large opening on the side which was always plugged up with a large cork, my grandmother used to fish out with a spoon a few cherries and give it to my sister Sheva and me.

This barrel of cherries and brandy was never empty. As soon as the new cherries appeared, my father used to buy a pailfull. My mother with the help of the maid used to wash and pit the cherries and pour them through the opening of the barrel which was partly full with last years cherries. On top of it my mother used to pour in a couple kilograms of sugar, adding to it a bottle of vodka. This brew used to ferment for a couple of weeks and turn into a real cherry brandy which privileged guests used to relish more then the well known in Poland "Baczewski" liquor that my father used to sell in our store.

This little barrel almost full was left behind with everything else when we were expelled from Shereshev.

After the cherries came the strawberries which farmers used to bring by the wagon full and sell by the quart or kilo if the farmer owned a scale. During the strawberry season we ate it in different ways, as plain strawberries with sour cream and buttered bread as a snack or as a dessert I used to add sugar having a sweet tooth.

Once in season, my father used to buy 10-15 kilo at once, my mother and the maid used to pick it over , wash it , put it into a large copper basin , cover it with a thick layer of sugar, and let it stay for 48 hours. By

then the sugar was absorbed by the strawberry juice and vice-versa. The entire copper container was then placed on the stove covering all burners and cooked for a couple of hours. While cooking the foam that used to form was taken off with a spoon and was the most delicious thing I have ever tasted.

And so used to start the season of preparing preserves and jams for the year. Next used to come the raspberries that used to be prepared in 2 ways. One, the same as the strawberries, the other used to be strained after cooking through a piece of linen and only the syrup or rather the liquid was saved. After staying in the cool cellar for a day or two, it used to jell and turn into a raspberry jelly of the purest quality.

The same was done with cherries and plums. Blueberry preserving had an additional purpose. It was preserved as we used to say in Shereshev, "It should not be needed", that is just in case, for it was believed, that blueberries is a great medicine for stomach ailments, particularly for dysentery.

Last in fall to be preserved were the cranberries which are as a rule very sour. In order to make them palatable, they had to be boiled kilo for kilo with sugar. For me, with a sweet tooth, it was never too sweet, but I ate it as my mother served it with meat for dinner For the winter, my mother used to fill up a shelf full of large earthen jars with cranberry jam, it was also used on bread as a snack.

We would also dry apples and pears particularly pears as they required less work. They had to be washed, cut in half and strung on a fine cord with a large needle and put in the heated bake oven for 24 hours. Apples on the other hand had to be peeled and sliced into thin slices, which required more time and were not much in demand for us youngsters as they were not as sweet as pears.

Although there was no shortage of cucumbers in Shereshev proper, produced by the local farmers, most of the cucumbers came from the nearby village of "Waszki", 2 kilometers away. This village was unique for it represented a classical as well as a characteristic village of my province Polesie that one can only read about or dream about now, but were abound in Polesie and the entire Prypec basin.

The village of Waszki was sitting in the middle of a swamp and it had one connection with the world through Shereshev by a connecting row of wooden planks suspended by poles stuck in the swamp.. This walkway continued for almost the entire 2 kilometers. In order to sell their produce, the inhabitants of the village, carried it on their backs to the market in Shereshev, including cucumbers.

They too had to be washed and put into a large wooden barrel spiced with dill, garlic, bay leaves and other spices. The barrel was then topped up with water and left in the cellar to sour.

A similar process took place during the making of sauerkraut, except that it was done on the living room table and the whole family took part in chopping up the cabbage. While filling up the barrel now and then, some cranberries were added , it used to give the sauerkraut a nice appearance in the barrel and on the plate. Both items, the sour pickles and the sauerkraut, used to last all winter in the cellar., together with the sacks of potatoes, beets, carrots, not to mention the preserves.

The last few weeks of school year 1933-34, went by fast, but with a touch of apprehension, for my father decided to do with me as he did with my sister Sheva, namely to transfer me to the Polish school. Because of my poor knowledge of the Polish language, I, too, like my sister, had to loose an entire school year. Having just finished the 4th grade Hebrew school, I was accepted in the 4th grade of the public Polish school.

Never the less I considered myself lucky, for the boys that have at the same time graduated from grade 7 Hebrew school were accepted to grade 5 Polish school, thus losing 3 years while I lost only one. All due to the lack of the Polish language, for it is my opinion that the level of education in the Hebrew school of the other subjects was somewhat higher than in the Polish. A phenomenon that is applicable even today between public schools and private ones.

The summer vacation was as pleasant as always, yet one could feel an uneasiness among the Jews of Shereshev. People began reading the newspapers more thoroughly, but nobody shared the reason with us 10 year olds.

I recall one day as the newspapers arrived carrying the headlines announcing the death of the most popular Hebrew poet. It read "Chaim Nachmen Bialik is Dead". I believe that it made a greater imapt on us youngsters than on the grown-ups, for we have just began to study and memorize his beautiful and moving poetry.

Predominantly 2 Jewish papers were read in Shereshev, the rightist "Der moment" and the leftist "Der Haint". Both of those papers were printed in Warsaw at midnight, arrived to Pruzany in the morning and to Shereshev at noon. The franchise for the paper's in Shereshev belonged to a man by the name of Moshe Bikshtein. His function was to wait for the arrival of the bus with the papers at noon and distribute them to his subscribers.

To subscribe to a newspaper for one person was too expensive, so people used to pair up in 2 or 4 thus creating a partnership to one paper. My father and grandfather were partners to one paper. When one was finished with it, the other got it. If there were 4 partners to a paper, the paper was in use all day. Some partners used to get it the following morning.

Three kilometers from Pruzany, in the direction of Shereshev and a kilometer off the main road, was a village called "Shubitch," whose inhabitants were farmers. Next to their fields, was an estate belonging to a Jewish man by the name of Brzyzynski, a decent respectable humane and committed Jew. The estate consisted of the main building, a big house with many rooms, a couple smaller buildings for the help, a couple long buildings with individual rooms and kitchens, a few separate cabins and some stables and barns for the few dozen cows and horses, as well as some sheds for farm machinery. All this was surrounded by many hectares of land and pastures.

But the main attraction of this estate was its forest which was divided in half by a road leading from the estate to the main road of Pruzany to Bialowieza via Shereshev. One half of the forest close to the village was on low ground and consisted of leafy trees. The other half was on higher sandy ground overgrown with pine trees.

It was this part of the forest that attracted many wives and their children from Pruzany and a few from Shereshev for the summer.

With the increase in our family my mother had to give up our yearly summer vacations in Domaczewo which was over 100 kilometers away and a strain on my mother and my little brother Liova as well as my two little sisters Sonia and Liba, still an infant and settle for the much closer "Shubitch".

There at Brzyzynskis my mother could rent a large room and a kitchen where she could cook meals for the family. My father used to stay at home to keep the store open and come out on Friday afternoons with the bus that was commuting between Shereshev and Pruzany returning the same way on Saturday night.

It was stylish in those days to put on weight and this was the purpose of going to the country. So my mother used to spend entire days making us delicacies so we should eat more. The requisite was two eggs and a glass of milk 3 times a day. In order to drink the milk, my mother used to bribe me with a piece of chocolate. After this we were suppose to eat a regular meal. Not surprising that we did not want to eat and even my mother's bribes did not help. My mother's entire effort of those hot days remained untouched on the table.

Is it then surprising that those laden tables with all sorts of good foods, that I refused to eat, haunted me throughout the dark and hungry days of Auschwitz giving no respite to my regrets.

The other 2 families from Shereshev that used to spend the summers with us in Shubitch were my uncle Rubin Kantorowitz and Avram Kolodzicky. They, the men just like my father, used to come to the country for the Sabbath.

As far as I remember, the owner of the estate had 4 sons and 1 daughter. The oldest Label some dozen years older than I, built like a wrestler, left for the land of Israel in 1931-32. The second Peipe , a tall handsome young man, like the movie stars of old. The third, 3 or 4 years older than I was called "Moniek" (Moishe), and the youngest Yoshpe (Joseph), my age. The daughter "Minah", some 8 or 9 years older than I, used to entertain us children with songs. Her voice as it used to be said in those days, "of a nightingale" kept on flowing from her mouth adorned with the most beautiful teeth I have ever seen.

I heard that she got married before the war and perished in Auschwitz with all the inhabitants of Pruzany including her husband, child and youngest brother Yoshpe. Fortunately, the 2 middle brothers, Peipe and Moniek, managed to join their older brother Leibl in the land of Israel shortly before the war.

It happened by chance, I met all the Brzyzynski brothers at a memorial service for the ghetto Pruzany some 15 years later that was held in Tel-Aviv at "Bet Hachalutz."

It seems that for my mother, one month of such a "rest" in the country was enough, and she and the children used to return home. I continued to stay on for a week or two with my Aunt Chashkah, my father's brother, Rubin's wife and children. Returning with him on a Saturday night by bus for I did not enjoy a return trip home by horse and buggy, a buggy full of bags, baggage , bedding, dishes, and other things that women used to take along for the summer. In order for my uncle and me to catch the 10:00 o'clock bus going from Pruzany to Shereshev, we had to leave Shubitch and walk along a field road for a kilometer to the main road. We gave ourselves enough time and got to the road early. Having nothing to do, I stretched myself out on the grass and looked up to the dark blue sky, strewn with countless stars. It was a dark night and it seems that one could count them all. I think that it was the first time and maybe the only time, I ever saw such a starry sky. It was good to come back home to mom and dad, and my older sister, Sheva who always acted towards me

like a devoted big sister and guardian, she followed my mother's actions, pampering me and giving in to my every whim. To my little brother Liova (Label), almost 7 years younger than I, who used to look up to his older brother with love and admiration. To my little 2 sisters, Sonia, then 3 years old, and the little one, Liba, just 1 and half years old. Our family, like many others in Shereshev those days, was very tightly knit and raised closely, dependent and devoted to each other. I can recall that already in 1934, when my parents used to go out once in a while to visit family or friends for the evening and leaving me and my sister to look after the little ones. My sister Sheva was not 13 years old and I only 11, if it happened that one of the little ones woke up, my sister and I used to take turns holding them in our arms and walking with them back and forth until they used to fall asleep, never running to our parents for help.

With the end of the summer vacation 1934, I went back to school. Unlike other years however, instead of finding myself amongst my last year's classmates, I found myself in an entirely new and strange environment. Gone were the familiar friendly faces of my playmates and peers, the common interests, the familiar layout of the school. Instead, I found myself amongst school children who spoke a hardly familiar language, who knew each other but ignored me. They seemed to be rougher in conduct and language. Their dress was somewhat different and so even their smell.

The school was situated in the court lane which was over half a kilometer farther from our house, than the Hebrew school. It had many more rooms, 2 of each from grade 1 to grade 4, grades 5,6, and 7 had single rooms, due to the attrition and grade failure. Grade 5 was usually the largest class, but by the time it reached grade 7, it had shrunk to the customary 40 pupils in class.

Being a much larger school than the Hebrew one, it had a much larger yard, partly surrounded by a fence, a large space between the school and the road, was planted with osier that was used by the students for art and craft lessons. A sturdy fence was separating the school yard from the street, along and behind the fence in the yard, was a long ditch of a hundred meters which used to be full of stagnate water all year long. In an exceptional hot summer, the water used to dry out for a few weeks and the smell of the dead tadpoles and frogs could be felt quite a distance. The ditch was overgrown with trees on either side. The most noticeable were a couple of huge oak trees whose branches covered not only the ditch, but reached over the fence and the other side of the road.

In the end of August an unusual amount of acorns used to fall off those oak trees and cover the road almost ankle deep nobody bothered to pick them up.

There were around 450 students in that school as compared 125 in the Hebrew school. Amongst those 450, there were 100 Jewish children, mostly girls. Jewish parents wanted to give their sons a Jewish education. What it meant was to be able to pray and know some of the Torah. This they could only get in the Hebrew school or in "Heder" and most of the Jewish boys were there. Other Jewish boys, sons of tradesmen used to start learning the trade of their fathers at the age of 12 or 13, thus quitting school.

It was not considered absolutley necessary for a girl to know the Torah, as long as she knew the laws, so many attended the Polish school as education there was free.

The school building itself was the largest wooden structure in Shetl and included in it were also the living quarters of the principal. A tall man by the name of Falshewsky, of about forty, with his wife of a noticeably younger age and exceptional beauty. They had no children Hailed from deep Poland, a former Pilsudsky legionary, a fanatical nationalist, patriot and anti-Semite. His outlook was the same as all the other stranger-migrant Poles, that were sent to reclaim back the Poliesie territories to Poland at the same time alienating the local population by looking at them from above with the air of masters.

The school had a large room especially for arts and crafts and an adjoining room for the tools. There was also a kitchen for poor and needy children who used to get a bowl of soup during the long break.

Understandably Jewish kids did not eat there for 2 reasons. Firstly, the school executive would refer the Jewish kids to Jewish welfare organization to look after them. Secondly, Jewish children would not eat in a kitchen run by non Jews without ritual supervision.

The school office took up a large room having to accommodate a dozen teachers, two of them local men. One of them a single middle aged man who lived with his middle aged single sister and their mother in a huge wooden house that served once as a rich landowners mansion. In fact, his ancestral home, for unknown to me reasons in the last one or two generations lost the glitter, the financial situation turned away and the house that once served as the seat of a rich and powerful Polish landowner took on the form of a shabby thread bare, almost haunted relic of former glory. Even the large yard the fallen fences and neglected orchard added

to its ghostly presence. The whole place seemed to be haunted and people avoided it. Even youngsters from the neighbouring houses did not dare run in and grab some ripe appetizing apples or other fruit. So they lay there rotting in the weed overgrown orchard.

I recall as an eight or ten year old boy, I was taken along by my Uncle Hershel, on a Saturday afternoon, he and his group of young men and girls went to visit their former teacher, the sister of my teacher Wujtkowsky. I vaguely remember the inside of that house, the large rooms full with furniture for which I could not see a purpose, the carpets on the floor and more on the walls depicting all kinds of exotic places and fantasies. Countless couches and heavily padded chairs and a large black grand piano in the middle of one room. The windows were heavily draped and did not let in much daylight.

One detail all those things had in common that did not escape even the notice of a 10 year old boy was the old and worn out look of everything.

This teacher Wujtkowsky who and whose family lived under Russian rule for almost two centuries retained their Polish identity and language, nor did he feel bitter or hurt and remained a decent man who fulfilled his job as a teacher exemplary.

The second local teacher was a man of about fifty by the name of Leonczuk, who graduated from a teachers seminary during the Czar's reign. When the Poles took over the territories of western Bialorus and Ukraina in 1920 he remained in his birth place Shereshev. Although a Russian Orthodox, or as they were called Pravoslavny by faith, the Poles retained him as a teacher with his slightly Russian accented Polish. It could have been the shortage of Polish teachers in our part of Poland.

Outwardly and in general he made a very good impression on the population and on the students and could certainly not be accused of anti-Semitism. He had two daughters, one my sister Sheva's age and were classmates. The second my age and in my class. Both well behaved girls to whom it made little difference in associating with Christian or Jewish classmates.

The teacher Leonchuk's only weakness was the desire to drink. As government employee and particularly as a teacher, it would not be becoming to do it in public like in a tavern of which there were four in shtetl. But there was only one retail store, ours, where it was strictly forbidden to drink nor even to unseal a bottle.

Every day this teacher on his way to school and back had to pass the market square where most of the stores were, among them, ours. Quite

often on his way back from school, this teacher could not withstand the temptation and used to come in to our store for a bottle of vodka. It seems that his wife forbade him to do it. After persistent nagging and pestering, he succeeded in getting my father's permission to buy a small hundred gram little bottle of vodka, go behind the shelves where the space served as the warehouse and with one swing, he used to pour it down his throat.

Those two local teachers were the only two that were and remained permanently employed in Shereshev up to the war. All others were being rotated every few years.

The language of instruction in school was of course Polish but among ourselves, we spoke Yiddish, that is the Jewish children. The Christians spoke a white Russian dialect as in their home. Conversation among Jews and non-Jews was conducted in the local white Russian dialect. There might have been in the school of 450 students, a dozen or less students that spoke Polish. They were the children of the government employees that came from Poland proper to run things.

I would like to mention that there was one Jewish family in Shereshev where only Polish was spoken. It was a family of the pharmacist Baumritter in whose house Russian was spoken up to 1930 and suddenly they switched to Polish. They had two daughters, the younger one Lola who was in my class and an older one by a ten years, Mira. The younger one Lola at the age of fifteen, just before the start of the war was already renown for her beauty in the entire district.

The pharmacist's sister was the dentist in shtetl. She married in the early thirties, a girl in her forties. Her husband was a tooth technician. Never-the-less they all accommodated their customers and patients in the necessary language; with Jews in Yiddish, locals in white Russian and Poles in Polish.

The first year in the Polish school was a very difficult one for me. I had trouble communicating with my teachers as well as with the none-Jewish students. Fortunately some of the Jewish students had the same problem, and as the saying goes "Troubles shared in common are endurable."

However, my father used to make sure that after school I come to the store and he used to go over with me on all I learned in school and made sure that the homework was in order.

I still can not understand where and when my father learned Polish, for his background was Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. Yet he spoke and wrote a perfect Polish to such an extent that when a Jewish man had a

problem or was in trouble with the government and had to explain himself in writing, be it a petition or an application and forward it to the higher authorities in the nearby district town of Pruzany, they used to come to my father to write it for them and not to the local barrister. One of the reasons being that my father did it as we say in Hebrew "L'shem Mitzvah". (for the sake of a good deed and not for pay.)

For a none explainable reason I developed a taste for Polish history and my father made sure that I memorized each lesson, to such an extent that in every term I used to get the highest mark in it despite the language problem. My other highest mark in class was for mathematics, which I continued to receive up to graduation. The only challenger in math use to be the other Jewish boy in class Leizer Eisenshtein.

This Eisenshtein's father Yaakol-Berl who was considered a progressive Melamed (private teacher-instructor), started giving private Hebrew lessons to my sister Sheva as soon as she transferred to the Polish school, the same happened to me. So every day he used to come to us at six o'clock for an hour giving us private lessons.

The order of school days changed for me, too. In the Hebrew school we attended six days a week, excluding Saturday (the Sabbath), while Sunday was an ordinary school day. In the Polish school we had to attend Saturday under the threat of expulsion in case of absencia. However, Jewish children were not obliged to write on Saturday, which they would not do in any case, even under the penalty of expulsion. So we Jewish children sat on Saturdays in school, without having touched a pen, pencil or chalk.

In that school I came for the first time face to face with outright Anti-Semitism. Of course, I had heard about it, but really did not understand it.

There were two teachers, a married couple by the name of Gulawsky. They lived on a short little street called Kapielica at the end of Ostrowiecka Street leading to the village of Zaretche. She, that is, his wife, a tall partly aristocratic looking woman, kept herself aloof even towards the other teachers, was teaching us drawing. She indeed had a talent for drawing which we children could already appreciate. Her husband, a shorter man, was always seen with his inseparable walking cane, which was in fact a mountain climbing stick with a sharp metal point at the bottom and a metal elongated head on top which ended at one end in an ax like shape and the other end with a pick ax point. A story was going around in shetl that when he was asked by an acquaintance to

what use is such a cane when there is no mountain for five hundred kilometers around, he replied that it would come in handy to split Jewish heads.

When I passed the following year to grade five, he became our gym teacher. One time he took the class for a walk to a nearby forest, by the name of Kupiczer Woods. The forest terrain was covered with conifer cones and the classmates started throwing them at us- the two Jewish boys. At first we ignored it, but instead of stopping the throwing intensified. The teachers pretended not to see it. Finally, we protested to him. He then turned to the students with those words ; "one should not deal with Jews in such an obvious way, one should approach it in a more civilized way like not give work to Jewish craftsmen or artisans, and more important, not to buy from Jewish stores.

This was said by a teacher in a so called democratic Poland even before the Nurenberg Laws appeared in Nazi Germany.

Who could have foreseen what the future held for Europe in general and the Jews in particular.

Shortly, after the Sukkoth holidays (Tabernacle holidays), my grandmother Freida-Leah Auerbach began to feel weaker and started to spend more and more time in bed. My mother had to make for her every meal if and when my grandmother felt like eating. My sister Sheva and I used to go see our grandmother as soon as we got back from school.

Despite the fact that our grandmother was only one house away from us, my mother preferred to have her with us. Right before Chanukah (the Eight-Day holiday commemorating the purification of the Temple), we took our grandmother over to us, where she spent the whole winter already in bed. Her situation kept on getting worse. The doctor used to come and write prescriptions which didn't seem to do much good. With medicine so far advanced now there are still so few guarantees. One can imagine what it was like seventy years ago. As it was the manner in those day, the doctor ascribed it to old age.

Old and not so old friends and acquaintances of my grandmother and of ours used to come constantly to visit my grandmother. I cannot recall an evening when we were left alone. Not to mention the members of the "Linat-Hatzedek" (Benevolent association). That were volunteers who sat up all night with the sick to give a nights rest to the members of the family.

The year 1934 was coming to an end. Christmas was approaching. The class began to learn and rehearse the carols. To me it was new a

phenomenon completely alien. Jewish kids were exempt from singing but had to attend it, same as we had to attend every morning prayer but exempt from saying it.

Jewish students were also exempt from religious classes conducted for Catholic students by the priest and for Greek Orthodox by the Greek Orthodox priest or pope as he used to be called.

While the two of us Jewish boys did not attend those classes, we used to feel the consequences as soon as the class was over with the insults, name calling, pushing and kicking that used to start with renewed rage and fury after every religious lecture.

My new world, my new surroundings in which I suddenly found myself wasn't easy to adjust to. True, we were exempt from attending classes on Jewish holidays except Saturdays, I was still missing the pre holiday atmosphere in the Hebrew school. Instead we were introduced to a new number of holidays unknown to me up to that time.

Previously, we adhered to the semi-religious, semi-national holidays with preparations at school and at home, but now the contact with the non-Jewish classmates was a cool one. Limited to subject-lessons, particularly to math's where we Jewish boys, excelled. In case a Christian pupil felt obliged to speak to a Jewish one awhile longer, he would be reproached by a friend.

In such an atmosphere, I welcomed the year 1935. Fortunately, after school and homework, and after the private Hebrew lessons that I and my sister Sheva used to get from Yankl-Berl Eisenstein between six and seven , after which he gave us a half hour in violin lesson, I still found the time to spend with my friends.

We still liked to go sliding down the hill or spend time in the local of the Beitar. Our original group of six had grown to eleven.

Because of such a number, it was inevitable that frictions would arise, which eventually led to a split up. In a sense it was surprising that such a large group held together this long. I would attribute it to the many activities in Beitar, that kept us busy most of our free time.

In winter 1934-35 our Beitar received an unexpected and honored guest in the person of our former Hebrew school principal and founder of the Beitar organization in Shereshev, Yaakov-Shaye Peker. He had left Shereshev a year and a half ago as the principal and in charge of the Beitar in Shereshev, returning now as a teacher or as they were called in Poland as professor in the Hebrew gymnasium (high-school) in Pinsk, as well as "mfaked-agaglil" (commander) of the Beitar in the district of

Poliese. A promotion he received from the headquarters of Beitar in Warsaw.

Did he really come to visit the organization or did he want to impress the Shereshev Jewish community with his double promotion as professor and district commander? Nobody knew. For us young boys, however, it was a real holiday.

That evening that he came to visit us in our locale, we were all dressed up in our uniforms: brown hats and brown shirts, navy pants and polished shoes. Lined up in a straight line, like soldiers, not daring to blink an eye, we followed our commander as he strode along our lines in his uniform, hoping that we are worthy of his glance. Deep in our hearts we hoped that he still remembered and recognized us.

When we were freed from our rigid posture and the atmosphere warmed-up, it turned out that he remembered most of us by name.

Some forty years later, I met him at a Remembrance gathering of the survivors of the Ghetto Pruzany that took place in New York. It turned out that in 1939 at the out break of the war, he was in Warsaw from where the leadership of the head command of Beitar managed to get to Romania with the German army in pursuit behind them. From Romania they got to the land of Israel, still Palestine then. After many years, he and his second wife and second daughter, Dara, named after his first one that perished with her mother in the Warsaw Ghetto, moved to the United States.

To the best of my knowledge, he was my only Jewish teacher that survived the Holocaust.

The year "Tartza" representing the Jewish calendar year 5695 corresponded with the world calendar 1935. That Jewish year happened to be a leap year, that is it had an additional month called "Addar Sheiny"(second Addar.)

It was warm enough that March 28/35 to play outdoors without a coat. We were playing near my friend Moshe Gelman's house that was near "Reb-Isaac's" synagogue, when a woman well known to me, Chashah Krenitzer, passed by. I knew her well for it was her husband, Nathan's mother, who used to live in my grandparents Auerbachs house. The old lady who used to bring us milk every morning, came rain or shine, summer or winter, as long as I could remember. That Chashah turns to me and almost casually asks me: how is your grandmother? I, having been home no more than two hours ago answered, "about the

same." She, without changing the tone of her voice or without any hint said "you better go home."

I, out of habit of listening to older people went straight home where I found my grandmother lying on the floor, covered with a sheet and two burning candles at her head. My mother stood bent over her crying bitterly. There were quite a few people in the house, neighbours, friends and acquaintances, or anybody who just heard the news. The women cried along with my mother. The men stood in silence some with sorrowful faces, others with downcast eyes, yet others in small groups of two or three whispering to one another.

All that late afternoon and evening, people kept on coming and going. Finally, they all left except for a couple of old men who continued to sit with the dead body, reading uninterruptedly psalms through the night.

We kids fell asleep. I was awakened at five in the morning by my mother's quiet sobbing. Getting out of bed, I found my mother crying quietly over my grandmother Freida-Leah's body. It did not take long before we were all up, and my father tried to quiet her down a bit, but with little success.

The two old men who were sitting near the body all night seeing that we are all up and about, had gotten up quietly and left. It did not take long before the townspeople began to gather. First came the women from "Khevre-Kadisha" (burial society) who started with the process of "Thahara" (purification, cleaning the body before burial.) Others started making the "Tachrichim" (shrouds in which every Jew has to be buried in.)

Within a couple of hours the purification and the shrouds were ready. When I saw my grandmother, Freida-Leah again, she was already dressed in the shrouds and was being put on the "Mytha" (stretcher on which the corpse is carried.) She was covered with a black covering. Four mean lifted the extended handles of the stretcher on their shoulders and in a slow procession began to carry my grandmother in the direction of the Jewish cemetery on "Bet-Chayim" street. Behind them followed my mother, father, and us children, surrounded by, related by marriage, Peshah Winograd, her son Israel and his wife Ghitl with the children. Also, Peshah Winograd's two daughters with their husbands; Tzina and Fyvel Leihman and Sarah with her husband Yaakov-Meir Kabizecky. Followed by more distant relatives by marriage like Alter Gelershtein and son Zalman, my uncle Shloime's (Solomon), related by marriage the

family Maister, my father's brother Reuben and family, neighbors, friends and most of the townspeople.

It was not customary to reserve burial places in advance and people used to be buried in rows one next to the other. As we got to the cemetery my grandmother's grave was already dug and somebody noticed that the grave was exactly in front of my grandfather Laizer-Bears stone, adding that they must have a lot of ancestral merit to be laying next to each other.

Neither is it in the Jewish tradition to take a picture of funerals, but because my grandmother had two sons in the states, my uncle Shloime (Solomon) and a younger son Pesah (Phillip), the rabbi, Noah Liverant, gave permission to take pictures and send them to the sons. My mother was so complying to the observance of the law, that she didn't even keep a picture for her self or us.

The tradition of burial was the same as with my grandfather Laizer-Bear; covering the eyes with pieces of pottery, the sprinkling of Israel earth on the face, the earthen pillow under the head and a piece of twig in each hand. The only thing that was missing was the "Tallith" (prayer shawl) which is reserved for men only.

This is all that a Jew takes with him or with her into the grave.

With a painful and grieving heart I watched as my grandmother was being covered with the boards and as the first shovels full of earth are beginning to fall upon them. I don't know what was for me then more painful. The loss of my grandmother whom we always loved and received in return tenfold as much and who in the last few years became an inseparable part or our daily life. At a time when we began to realize and understand her love and devotion to us, or my mother's heart rendering lament and cries of grief that should have woken up my grandmother from her eternal sleep, as the falling shovel's full of earth were covering the boards who slowly disappeared under the continuously filling up grave.

Now after so many years, close to three quarters of a century later, I can console myself, or take comfort in the fact that both my mother's parents were favoured with being buried in a Jewish cemetery according to Jewish law, although now there is no sign of a Jewish cemetery left neither any other sign of Jewish vibrant life that existed in Shereshev for over five hundred years.

A few years later when my parents, brother and sisters were annihilated so brutally from this world, there was nobody left to mourn

them. There is not even a grave left over which I could say "Kaddish" (a prayer for the dead).

But than, in the mid thirties, normality and sanity was still the order of the day. It was after I matured that I understood my mother's loss. For not only was my grandmother, her loving mother, devoted to her with body and soul, but she also was the last member of my mother's family that she had in Shereshev. In all of Poland in fact, except for us children and my father.

Exactly the date of the demise of my grandparents Auerbach, I did not remember. It was only some fifteen years later on one of my first visits to my uncle Shloime (Solomon) and family in New York, that I was given by him the exact dates, which are; my grandfather Laizer-Bear Ben (son of) Shloime-Chayim, died 18 of the month of Chesshvan T.R.Z.V., corresponding to Oct. 29/32. My grandmother; Freida-Leah (nee Goldfarb) bat (daughter of) Nathan-Shabtay Hacohen, died 24 of the month of Adar-Shainy T.R.Z.A. corresponding to March 29/1935. I commemorate those days all that time and intend to continue as long as I can.

My grandmother died not quite three weeks before Passover. One can imagine what kind of mood we were in and in what state of mind my mother was preparing for the holiday. The first Seder night the atmosphere was so tense that even the small children felt it. It did not take long before my mother broke out in a heart rending lament to which my sister Sheva and shortly I joined her.

My little brother Liova (Leibl) who was almost six years old, my sister Sonia (Sarah) three and a half years old and even my little sister Liba a year and a half old looked at us with large uncomprehending fearful eyes, begging us not to cry.

There was no crying the second Seder night. Everyone tried to act normally, if it could be called so. Still the living go on with their lives.

The first two and the last two days of Pesah, the Jewish kids did not attend classes. Right after the holidays, with the improvement of weather, we could spend the recesses outdoors and keep the distance from the more aggressive classmates. Besides, the warmer weather carried the promise of summer and approaching vacation.

As I had mentioned earlier, my gymnastic teacher was that anti-Semite Gulawsky. According to schedule we used to have a gym lesson every Friday morning at 8 o'clock. Because of economy or other reasons, grade

five, six and seven used to have their gym lesson at the same time under the supervision of that same Gulawsky.

It happened on a Friday May 12/35 just after 8 o'clock, as we were lining up in a row on the sport yard on the corner of the main street Mostava and court alley, some two hundred yards from our school from which we just came. The teacher Gulawsky facing us was given instructions regarding the exercise . Facing us with his back to the fence he could not see the chief of police walking along the other side of the fence. The chief's walk was unusual, for he always walked erect with a military gait. This time, however, he walked slowly with his head lowered down.

Coming to the fence opposite Gulawsky, he stopped and called out to him The teacher somewhat surprised, turned around. Seeing the chief of police, he came over to him. They greeted each other warmly being of the same elite Polish class and after a short conversation, shook hands and the chief went on his way.

The teacher turned toward us and began to approach our line, what it seemed to me in my direction. Coming within a meter in front of me, he said in a calm and quiet voice, "Kantorowicz, wasz dziadek umarl", (your grandfather died.) I was taken aback and surprised. At that time, I had only one grandfather, that is my father's father, Yaakov-Kopel Kantorowitz, and on my way to school, I used to pass by my grandparent's house. It was less than a half an hour that I passed their house and everything seemed in order. How could the teacher know? Did the chief of police bring him the news? True, my grandfather was the mayor, but to those Poles he was no more than a despised Jew.

So I say to the teacher : How can it be? It is no more than half an hour that I passed by their house and everything seemed normal. This time he answered putting emphasis on each word; I did not say your (twoj) singular, I said yours (wasz) plural, your Jewish grandfather Marshal Piludsky.

At that moment, as a twelve year old boy, I did not realize nor could I form the notion of the amount of weight those few words carried.

I don't remember if that school day continued or not, but I remember how my parents and in fact, everybody in the street was distressed with the news. All kinds of rumors began to circulate about the rising anti-Semitism. About the chances of a war with Germany, although at that time Hitler hadn't shown yet his fully aggressive ambitions except for the "Reingebitt" annexation.

In general Jews considered Marshal Pilsudsky as friendly to Jews, not only because of his early socialistic symphaties but because of a more substantiated reason, conveniently avoided in Polish history, like King Kazmir's affair with the Jewess Esther.
The story goes like this; in his youth Pilsudsky was not only a fervent Polish nationalist and patriot, but also an adherent socialist. The czarist secret police or "ochrana," as they were called, were constantly on his heels. For both his ideals qualified him for a long stay in Siberia. Once, in Baranowicz, the czars police noticed him and gave chase.

Baranowicz like most eastern European shtetls was a maze of intervening streets and lanes huddled together closely like the Jewish inhabitants in them, as if in proximity or closeness, there was security. Pilsudsky in his desperate attempt to escape, ran into a Jewish home with the police behind him, asking the owner to hide him. The Jew, having little sympathy for the anti-Semitic Czarist police and guessing that the young Pole must be a revolutionary of sorts, maybe out of compassion or pity, chanced his freedom, pushing the young Pole into the next room threw over him a large "Tallit" (a prayer shawl, worn by Jews during prayers), that covered his head, most of his face and body, sticking a prayer book in his hands, and told him to rock back and forth in the manner Jews do while praying.

When the police burst into the house looking in every corner it never dawned on them to look at the in deep prayer engrossed Jew. So they left to look for him in the neighboring houses.

It seems that Pilsudsky had never forgotten the favor that the Jewish stranger did for him and while he was around the deep rooted Polish anti-Semitism was kept under check. One thing is for sure; after his death, persecution of Jews in Poland started in earnest, increasing as time went by.

Pilsudsky's funeral took a week during which schools and offices were closed. The population spent a lot of time listening to the couple of radios with loud speakers available in Shereshev which were playing funeral marches or attending memorial services in synagogues.

When at the end of the week Pilsudsky's remains were laid to rest in the "Wawel" of Krakow, the mourning period continued to the end of the month, after which the country returned to its normal rhythm. But regretfully, "normal" it never remained.

We children missed our grandmother Freida-Leah immensely, but more so did our mother. Now, not having anyone of her family in Shereshev,

she used to spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about her brother Shloime (Solomon) and his family in New York. It seemed to me that she dedicated more time talking to us about them than about anything else, waiting impatiently for a letter from her brother with the "good news". The "good-news" being that my uncle's older daughter Helen (Chvolkah) got engaged. With my mother, it was not just a wish but a prayer, which she used to repeat almost every day.

Unfortunately, my mother's prayer, one among many others, was not answered. My cousin Helen died at the age of seventy three unmarried.

I can understand now why I remembered my uncle Shloime and his family so well. Despite the fact that I was only six years old whey they left. They, in conversation and in thought have never left our house and my mother spoke of them continuously.

In spring of 1935, my mother had no relatives left in Shereshev from her side. But in the neighboring Pruzany, she had three cousins. One from her mother's side, Yosef Goldfarb, a son of Boris-Leib Goldfarb who was my grandmother Freida-Leah's brother. Yosef Goldfarb, was my mother's age, married and had a daughter Pearl, my sister Sheva's age and a son Menachem (Marvin) my age. My grandmother's brother, Boris-Leib lived with his wife and one son Yaakov in Simforopol Crimea.

The two other cousins my mother had in Pruzany were from her father's side. They were daughters of my grandfather Leizer-Bear Auerbach's brother Elkhonon (Chonah), who died before my time, leaving behind his wife Peshah and the two daughters. The older one, Sheina-Rochl (Rachel) married to Velvel Chmielnicky with two little daughters Channa and Itti, and a younger one still single, Taibl.

All this entire family left for the land of Israel, than Palestine, in that very year 1935.

My father's parents, grandfather Yaakov-Kopel, or Kopel as he was called and grandmother Chinkah, had at that time with them at home, their second youngest son Hershl, the younger daughter Pesl, and the youngest son Eli (Eliyahu) who was turning twenty one that is conscription age. According to Polish law, every male turning twenty one had to appear before a military medical commission which determined if the candidate was physically and mentally fit to serve in the army for the duration of two years. The only rejects were candidates that were the sole supporter of parents if they were over sixty years of age or if there was a younger under age child in the family. This is how my uncle Hershel managed to avoid military service.

Being born in 1904 he appeared in front of a commission in 1925 while his younger brother, Eli, was only 11 years old.

My uncle Eli could not benefit from this privilege as his older brother, hershel, was still home.

Jewish young men had little desire or showed little enthusiasm to serve in the army. Firstly there was the problem with dietary law that prohibits Jews from eating non-kosher food, a prerequisite for most Jews in those days. Secondly was the problem with anti-Semitism with which the army was saturated. Officers, under-officers and ordinary soldiers used to humiliate their Jewish comrades-in-arms at any possible occasion.

A sickly Jewish young man was the envy of all his friends, for he stood a good chance to be rejected from the army. One way to be rejected was to weigh under the required minimum of 48 kilograms, so countless Jewish young men used to start losing weight. Many used to form groups to be able to constantly watch each other so that he wouldn't eat or sleep. Many such groups use to spend their days and nights on bicycles, traveling from village to village or from Shtetl to Shtetl. At night not sleeping out of sheer boredom they use to at times wander the streets of the Shtetl causing some damage like removing doors from sheds, pushing over fences and alike. Understandably it was all in fun and did not cause serious damage. The victims of such pranks understood and symphatised with the young men and held no grudge against them.

The parents of those young men didn't sleep restfully either, what Jewish mother wanted to part with her son for two years? Especially when her son is spending all this time amongst "Goyim" (Gentils) to eat "Traifah" (non-kosher food) and not observe the "Sabboth" to, sleep on the ground for weeks in the summer and in snow in winter under the open sky during weeks long maneuvers.

How could a mother watch her son trying to loose weight by not eating nor drinking. Pushing himself on a bicycle day and night to total exhaustion. Among those young men was my father's youngest brother Eliyahu or Eli, as we called him who was nine years older then I. I can still see him pedaling his bicycle, stopping to exchange a few words with my father who was his oldest brother, as my uncle could speak more easily to my father as a brother than to his father, my grandfather, Yaakov-Kopl. My father served him in two ways, as a brother which he was and also as a father figure, being 22 years older than him. Besides all this, my father was an experienced soldier in peace-time having served under the czar in the city of "Kazan", the Tatar capital and in war when his regiment was sent to face the

Austrian and the German armies at the outbreak of the first world war where my father lost two fingers of his right hand. One day of that summer 1935 we, that is my father and I staying in front of our store noticed Eli pedaling by on his bicycle. He noticed us too and pulled over. To my father's question as how he feels, he answered "Miserable", he could barely keep his eyes open and could hardly stay on his feet from fatigue and hunger. Two months have passed since he started the torment of loosing weight and had two more weeks to go before the appearing in front of the commission. He was very much in doubt if he could keep it up, he really looked to me skin and bones. At a metre seventy five (5' 10") well built, he looked a shadow of his former self. To my father's question of how much do you weigh he answered "64 kilos", and how much did you weigh before?, asked my father, "eighty" came the answer. That means that it took you two months to loose 17 kilos and you have two more weeks to loose 17 more, said my father, you'll never make it, go home dear brother, have a good meal and go to sleep. My uncle took his advice.

A couple of weeks later my uncle Eli and all his friends born that same year faced the military commission and were all accepted into the army. I doubt if any of those dieting succeeded to loose enough weight to be rejected from military service. Their entire effort was in vain.

A year later he and some dozen other Jewish young men his age, most of them his friends and classmates were called up to the army.

My grandparents Yaakov-Kopl and Chinkah Kantorowitz had still at home their second youngest son Hershel and the younger daughter Pesl(Pola). She was a girl of thirty and at that time considered a spinster. Her problem was that she could not find a young man good enough for her in Shershev.

In those days it was quite stylish to use the intercession of a matchmaker and I can remember a few visits by young men who came to meet the prospective bride and her family, but used to go back empty handed. I have a suspicion that my aunt Pesl (Pola) was a bit fastidious. Besides this, dowry played a big role in arranging a marriage and a-well-to-do father could pick the best available young man for his daughter.

As for Shershev my grandfather Yaakov-Kopl was a-well-to-do-man and a respected member of the community. He was not elected mayor of the Shtetl for nothing nor as representative of Shershev "Kehilah"(Jewish community) in Pruzany. Yet, my aunt Pesl found her mate

at the age of thirty one. The man, her age, was from a place called Nieswierz a couple dozen kilometres from Baranowicz. Nieswierz is well known in Polish history as the seat of the Polish Princely Family the "Radziwil's".

The shtetl Nieswierz and all it's surrounding villages, fields and forests belonged to the family Radziwil. None of it was ever sold to anybody. If one, Jew or non-Jew wanted to build a house in Nieswierz or in the nearby villages he had to rent that piece of land from the Radziwil's and pay for it a yearly rent the same was applicable to the fields the farmers worked on, nearby was the magnificent mansion of the Radziwil's and at a distance the modern fish-ponds to which the local population used to flock to admire the method of the fish farming.

The man my aunt chose for a husband by the name of Zelik Remez came from an old established family with deep roots in Nieswierz. To faciliate the travel problem to the wedding the families decided to make the wedding in Baranowicz which was more convenient for either of the families. Besides Baranowicz was much larger that either Nieswierz or Shershev and there would be no problem to find accommodations for all the guests.

The wedding took place in the later part of the summer, to which besides my grandparents Kantorowicz went my parents, my uncle Reuben and his wife, my single uncle Hershel and my two aunts and uncles from Pruzany.

The newly weds remained living in Nieswierz where my new uncle Zelik Remez had a leather business.

The summer vacation of 1935 ended and I found myself in grade five, my sister Sheva began grade seven. In her class were a few Jewish girls and two Jewish boys. One of the girls was her friend Choma Liverant(Nechama) the Rabbi's youngest daughter and another girl Tieble Chidricky whose younger sister was in my class. The two boys were Leizer (Lazar) Rotenberg who was one of my best friends by two years older than I and Meir Liverant the rabbi's older son. The rabbi did not send his children to the Hebrew school as the religious lessons were not traditional enough for him.

Despite the fact that I have already spent a year in that school I somehow forgot through the summer what it was like to spend so much time in a not Jewish surrounding. The relationship between the Christian boys towards the two Jewish ones in my class if it was changed it was for the worst.

The fifth grade was formed from the former two grades four. It was larger in space and in number of students with a minimum of sixty, among them ten Jewish kids, eight girls and two boys. Interesting to note that of the ten Jewish kids all graduated three years later from grade seven, while the total graduating number dwindled from sixty to forty. Here I want to note again that the attendance of Jewish boys in the Polish or Public school was minimal, for it was of great importance to parents to give a Jewish boy a Jewish-Religious education which they could obtain in the Hebrew school and more so in a Heder(traditional Hebrew school). This was the reason why there were so many Heders in Shershev although there was the accredited Hebrew school.

I was not the only one to put up with anti-Semitic hostility in school. Jewish students were always subjected to it to a certain degree in every grade. It only fluctuated in intensity at various times. In my sisters class, the seventh, some students used to sneak up to a Jewish student and smear the lips of the student with a piece of pork, knowing that it was the most antagonizing act toward a Jew.

One day my sister Sheva came home and told my parents that someone did it to her. Somehow the story reached my grandfather Yaakov-Kopl. By coincident, a few days later a delegation from the department of education in the provincial city of Brest-Litovsk came to Shershev to see what can be done to improve the state of the school in respect to education, hygiene, discipline and others.

At that meeting were representatives not only from the provincial capital but from the district town as well as representation from local authorities, among them my grandfather Yaakov-Kopl as the mayor.

During that meeting as the subject of hygiene came up and discussion about its budget began, my grandfather announced that he would like to contribute personally a certain amount of money toward buying towels. Everybody looked up in astonishment, firstly there was no collection of donations but a budgetary discussion, secondly, why for towels? To which my grandfather answered: so that Jewish students will have with something to wipe their lips after their classmates have smeared them with pork.

The principal blushed a bit and said that the guilty student had been punished for it, to what my grandfather said; it wasn't the first nor the only act. The principal promised to put a stop to it. However as far as I and my sister knew nobody was reprimanded, nor did this action stop.

In one of the first chapters, I mentioned gypsies living in Shereshev. It started with the two gypsy brothers, that somehow found their way to Shershev and eventually became local residents. They married local girls and raised families. It seems that they found it difficult to rid themselves of their innate profession of horse trading. Despite the fact that they lived among farmers and married farmer girls, they stuck to their tradition of horse dealing and stealing.

For my time one of those two brothers died of natural causes, the other named Vavrus was shot by police in middle of the town in 1929, a fact that I described earlier. This Vavrus left some dozen sons in ages from 10 to 30 when he was killed. They were known not only as horse dealers and thieves, but also as violent and vicious fighters of whom the entire shtetl, Jews and non-Jews were afraid.

One of those gypsy brothers, the second youngest, who was a year or two older than I, was in my class. Needless to say that the entire class feared him. In fact, the entire school, not so much that they feared him, as for the reputation of his family. As usual, most students would take to school a light lunch to eat during the long break. Consisting usually of black bread with butter, or cheese or hard boiled eggs. White bread, challah, or anything baked from wheat was seldom seen or eaten except for the Sabbath, simply because wheat flour was much more expensive.

We, being one of the better off families in Shershev used to see white bread at home during the middle of the week, too. My mother used to make sure that I take a white roll for lunch and not black bread. I used to notice at times, envious glances from other students.

I got an idea to offer a piece of the roll to that gypsy classmate, who accepted it greedily. From that time on, he became my protector, even the other Jewish boy in my class benefited from it. The daily piece of roll protected me from many a beating, shoving, pushing and other abuses.

Unfortunately, did this protection last only through grade five, where he flunked that year and remained in the same grade for another year. In grade six, the harassment and persecution returned. That gypsy student did not remain in grade five to long, he gave up school shortly afterwards. When I saw him a year later, it was at the market square, he was a full grown man hanging around with a young group like himself, following in his brothers footsteps, drinking and fighting likewise.

Returning to the winter 1935-6, our group of boys began to split into two groups. I started getting closer to the two brothers Lazar and Litek Rotenberg, Kalman Kalbkoif, Meir Kalbkoif and Itzik (Isaak) Maletzki. With the others of our group we used to meet only in the local of the Beitar.

At that time the Revisionist organization had left the world Zionist organization and formed a new one called "New Zionist Organization." The quarrel between those two organizations intensified by the day and reached its culmination in the summer of 1936 when Jabotinsky was trying to get a million Jewish signatures on a petition to Britain for an increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine.

With the approaching winter we boys used to take advantage of the immense expanses around Shershev. As I mentioned earlier the surrounding territory was as flat as a table and the little river called "Lesna" from the Polish word "Las" (forest) that surrounded Shershev from every side and from somewhere in it the river took its source, it used to spill over its low lying banks flooding surrounding meadows, marshes, quagmires and low lying fields, changing the tiny river into a two kilometer lake along its banks. This flooded area used to freeze creating an immense skating rink that could take us to the end of the horizon where we used to discover lands and swamps unaccessible to us in the summer time.

The ice undisturbed and clear of snow was transparent and we skating over it, could see below every blade of grass or plant, even the variety of bugs that went on with their lives below the ice. From time to time we could see a fish that would leave the river or summer confinement and venture to forage for a snack among the flattering grasses and weeds under the ice. Some used to try and catch a fish by carrying a club shaped like a mace and hit with it the ice with the intention of stunning the fish which could be within a meter of the place of impact. If it worked and the fish became stunned for a few seconds, this gave us enough time to break the ice with a club, which was no more than 7 centimeters thin and pull the fish up. Frankly speaking, it was not as easy as that. By nature, the fish does not linger in one place, but keeps on moving, at times they used to swim by faster than the blink of an eye and one had to be quicker than that. However, there were a few that used to earn a couple of zloty now and then by catching some fish. Some used to make fish traps from osier branches and place them under the ice, making the rounds every morning, breaking the ice and pulling the traps out and if lucky, finding in them a scattered fish. The fish

like meat, had to be eaten shortly as there were no means of preserving or freezing perishables of any sort in those days.

I said that there was no means of cooling anything in Shershev, but I am wrong to a certain point. There was ice available in Shershev in the summer months and I think it is worthwhile describing it.

Along the east side, our side, of the market square, were three brick houses, out of the eight in the square and in town. The closest to us belonged to a Christian family by the name of Kolosko, the second next to them belonged to the family Alter Gellerstein, next to them and at the very corner of Ostrowiecka Street belonged to the family Maletzky, whose son Itzik was my friend. The middle one of those three houses, the one that belonged to Gellerstein was not only the biggest on the east side, but had a lot of land behind it, most of it taken up by the biggest and best looked after orchard in town. The owner, Alter Gellerstein spent in his younger days, some years in the United States and after coming back to Shershev, spent his savings on one of the biggest real estate pieces in town, namely this big brick house, the land around it, and a small brick building on the corner of the market square and the main street "Mostowa," that served as a yard good store run by his unmarried yet son Zalmen, who was about thirty years old.

He, the old man Gellerstein, and his wife Esther Golda lived from the large orchard in which he used to sit up nights guarding against thieves when the fruits ripened, from the garden, and from rent collected from his partly rented out house.

However, the main attraction in their yard, was their ice chamber. From the outside, it looked like a thatched roof resting on the ground. Opening a side door one would in the semi darkness look down a large hole from which a sturdy ladder was sticking out, leading down into complete darkness. Climbing carefully down and getting slowly used to the darkness, one would notice at a quick glance all the walls around consisting of straw. Coming over closer and with a touch of ones hand, you could see that the straw serves only as an isolating covering for the blocks of ice behind it. This ice buried deep in the ground and well insulated with straw served the entire shtetl over the warm and hot months of the year.

The entire idea was construed by the local Jewish petty retailers whose business consisted mainly of selling soft drinks, called "Kvas" by selling it cold in the hot summer days, they hoped to increase their sales. It turned out to be a blessing not only for them, but for the entire population of Shershev. A piece of ice could help an old person survive a hot summer day. The piece of ice could be an old persons desire or the doctors

prescription, it could lower the temperature of a sick person whose high temperature put their lives in danger. True, that supply would not be enough to fill up ice boxes, but then again, their were no ice boxes in Shershev. But in emergencies, whatever ice there was served the purpose.

The ice used to come from the local river, hired hands used to cut the ice into fifty centimeter square blocks, as soon as the ice became 20 centimeters thick and hauled by horse and sled to that ice chamber. It would take a couple of weeks to fill that hole to the rim. I should add that the total expense used to be covered besides by the Jewish petty retailers, also by the Jewish community.

At that time of year, the ice was thick and safe. Because all weeds and grass was below it, the ice was clear of any obstruction and we could skate over it for kilometers. On a windy day we used to skate against the wind for a couple of kilometers, which was not an easy task. Having come to our destination, we used to turn around, unbutton the coats and opening it as far as it would go let the wind propel us back to town. The spread out coat laps serving as sails.

The enjoyment of that free ride made up by far the effort of the previous struggle against the wind.

After a couple hours of such fun-exercise, it was a pleasure to come home for dinner, which we always ate between 5 and 6 pm.

The winter dinner always consisted of meat, plentiful and nutritious and soup was served after the meat. That year my father started leaving me alone in the store while he went home for dinner. Earlier, my mother used to fed us and then go to watch the store, while my father used to come home to eat. It was no more than a walk of 2 or 3 minutes. In 1934 I used to go with my sister Sheva to mind the store for the half hour, but at the end of 1935 my father used to leave me by myself.

In general, I spent a fair amount of time in the store doing my homework. My father, liked to keep an eye on my studies.

To serve the customers, one did not have to be an expert. There is no difference between one bottle of vodka to the other. The same applies to cigarettes or tobacco. The fear of robbery did not exist. As long as I knew the prices, could add up, give change, there was no problem. The above qualifications I had.

Sometime a friend of mine or two, used to come in and the time used to pass quickly.

Christmas was approaching, in class the teaching and rehearsal of singing the carols started again. The conversations in class in and

out, revolved around the upcoming holidays. The Christmas nights, my parents did not sleep, as it was one of the two best business nights of the year. The Christian population going that night to mass, or on their way back wanting to drink and in the beginning, they used to come to the house knocking on the door. So my father decided to be around the store, for it was against the law to stay open at night. So my parents worked in teams. When one came in the store with a customer, the other stayed outside to make sure that a policeman was not approaching. If one did, a knock on the door signaled for them to remain inside until the policeman went by.

The Russian Orthodox celebrated their Christmas two weeks later, the same process repeated itself again.

The very same thing used to repeat itself on Easter.

It is possible that many Jews did not sleep well those nights, for in many places, particularly on Easter night, pogroms used to occur. Fortunately, as far as I know those nights in Shershev passed without disturbances, unlike many other places.

To be honest, the five policemen in shtetl were more lenient to the Jewish store keepers, those nights than on Sundays. It is quite possible, that they themselves were too lazy to go out in the street to chase the few Jewish storekeepers, they preferred to spend that night with their families.

In general, however, the Jewish storekeepers, played cat and mouse with the police every Sunday. Taking with them a member of the family to serve as a watchman they stood in front of the store waiting for a customer. If and when one appeared the store keeper took him into the store, while the other member of the family stood watch. Should a policeman appear, a knock on the door or window pane would be the warning for the store keeper and his customer to remain inside.

It happened many a time that a policeman used to hang around for awhile, thus forcing the store keeper and customer to stay inside until such time as the policeman left. The policemen were not easily fooled and at times stayed for a long time. On the other hand, the lookouts used to put on a padlock on the outside door, by it trying to convince the policeman that there cannot possible be someone inside.

However, did the policeman notice even from a distance, that someone even as much as opened or closed the door of a store, that store keeper used to be fined 5 zloty, which was less than a dollar in US money, but could represent a weeks earnings to a petty store keeper, and the poor unfortunate man had to pay.

To challenge the case in court would have been useless. It entailed hiring a lawyer, a couple trips to the court in Pruzany. Besides, a policeman's word was more acceptable by the court and the chances of winning the case were almost nil.

I began looking forward to the approaching winter holidays. It meant not having to get up while it was still dark outside, to get out of the house at a quarter past seven in the frosty morning, and by the time I got to school, I could not feel my ears, nose or cheeks. Even my hands, in the gloves felt numb.

Instead I could stay in a warm bed as long as my heart desired, for my mother with her boundless love, seldom said no to me, and I took advantage by staying in bed until late morning. If the weather was very cold I stayed in the house entertaining my little brother Leibl (Liova) with children stories, which I remembered from when I was his age, or read in children's books. At times even making up some of my own.

For those stories we were often joined with our cousin Shalom, my father's brother, Reuben's son who was a year older than my brother. Those two could sit for hours and listen to my stories, never tiring of them. Still I used to find time for my two younger sisters, Sonia (Sarah) and Liba. Although, admittedly my sister Sheva spent more time with them than I. I can say with pride that my little brother and sisters were being brought up to be well behaved and obedient children, not only towards our parents, but towards others.

In general children in the shtetl, were brought up under strict parental supervision and discipline, particularly under the fathers, who kept their sons on a short leash. Granted there were families where the women wore the pants, but I am speaking in general terms.

There were no guarantees that a youngster would not and could not go a stray. That does not say that as children, they were problematic. Such cases I do not recall. There were children who were more aggressive than others, more impertinent to other school mates, but not to the extent one sees or hears about now. If there were a couple such boys in the Hebrew school in my time, I would not wager an opinion now of what would become of them. They too perished with the entire Jewish community of Shershev.

To be absolutely honest, I will say that there were a few Jews in Shershev with whom the average member of the community would not like to have a disagreement.

There were a few middle aged Jews in shtetl who were renown as tough guys yet from their younger days, with whom not only Jews but non-Jews avoided crossing paths. In a sense it gave the down trodden tyrannized Jew a feeling of security, knowing that there are Jews unafraid to hit back. It also gave the rough-necks among the non-Jewish population reason to think twice before starting a brawl with the Jews.

With the coming of winter my mother started mentioning the approaching of my "Bar-Mitzvah" (a Jewish boys 13th birthday). She never missed mentioning the fact that my grandmother Freida-Leah hoped to live to see that day.

We children, not to mention already my mother, missed our grandmother immensely, for we had become attached to her lately, as she lived the last two years literally next to us, and the last six months with us. My mother put her up in the parlor of the house which was used before and after my grandmother passed away only for special occasions and special guests.

For a long time after my grandmother Freida-Leah passed away, whenever I used to come into the parlor, I used to instinctively glance in the direction where my grandmother's bed used to stay.

For my days, not in Shershev, not in the vicinity nor in the region much was made about a Bar-Mitzvah, a few days before the Bar Mitzvah the boy was shown by his rebe (the religious teacher) or by his father how to put on "Tephilin" phylacteries. On the Sabbath of his Bar-Mitzvah, the boy was called up to the Torah, usually getting the honor of "Mafter" (reading the lesson from the Prophets.)

In our synagogue there was a tradition of selling the "Aliyahs" (the honor of being called up to the reading of the Torah). In order to raise a few groshy (pennies) for the sustaintion of the synagogue. However, for the honor of the Mafter use to have a few bidders. The honors on holidays use to fetch bigger donations, especially the High Holidays.

The worshippers knew that that Sabbath I would be called up to the Torah. It also happened that another boy whose father was a member of our congregation turned Bar Mitzvah the same week. The boy's name was Lipa, the son of Gedalia Loshevitzy who lived on Kapielca Street. That boy, Lipa, had a sister by the name of Beila-Debora who was my sister Sheva's age and they both attended the same grade, but that Beila-Debora dropped out of school along the way.

In short, during the bidding, the members of the congregation made my father pay a substantial sum for my Mafter.

As far as I remember none of my friends have ever mentioned when they turned Bar-Mitzvah, and all of them were from three days to two years older than I.

Still, my mother invited my friends on Friday night after the Sabbath meal for cake and tea. In this consisted the celebration of my Bar-Mitzvah, and this was more than any of my friends had.

I was never enthusiastic about getting up early in the mornings, especially in the month of "Shvat' (February). As a Bar-Mitzvah boy I was expected to attend the daily prayers, especially in the morning. It meant getting up an hour earlier than usually. Fortunately, the so called "Groiser-Bet-Medrosh" (The Large Synagogue) was next door to our house.

I will confess that after one month attendance the services I gave it up. The idea of getting up so early in the winter morning did not appeal to me. Besides, none of my friends continued to attend the services more than a month or two after their Bar-Mitzvahs. A fact that enhanced my argument with my parents about me giving up the daily attendance of the services.

Many of the long winter evenings I spent reading, at times until the early hours of the morning. At times my mother used to get out of bed to try to persuade me to put the book aside and get a few hours of sleep before going to school. It was her concern for my health, for me ruining my eyes, as there was a belief that much reading ruins the eye sight and her difficult job of getting me up in the morning after only a couple hours of sleep when I used to leave for school with my eyes half shut. She knew how difficult it was for me and I knew how much I am hurting her when she saw me in such a state. Yet my father would never interrupt my reading even if I would sit up all night, which happened few times.

Never-the-less I still fund time to go to the local of Betar, which at that time moved to the house of Joshua Pinsky. It was no part of his main house, but a totally separate house in his immense yard. For me it was very convenient ,all I had to do was cross the market square. As I was spending there so much time anyway playing with my friends, the brothers Leizer and Litek Rotenberg, who were Joshua's grandsons and lived in the wooden part of the house adjoining the main brick building. I was almost part of the family.

The two brothers Rotenberg had one sister Pola, two years older than Laizer and two younger sisters, one Lisa, born in 1927 and a younger Mina born in 1930. The oldest, Pola learned in the gymnasium in Pruzany, but in 1 936 she gave it up and went to attend an "Ort" (Jewish sponsored trade school) in Pinsk, to become a dressmaker.

The Rotenberg children had an aunt Sonia, a sister to their mother Rayie (Reitze), she Sonia lived with her parents in the main building. She had her own beautifully furnished room in Shtetl. She was the only girl in shtetl who's father could afford to send her to study abroad and she did study in Prague, Czechoslovakia. One had to be privileged to be invited into her room, which we twelve or thirteen year old boys did not have.

Despite the fact that Leizer and Litek were her nephews, we, and only the three of us, have been in her room no more than a couple of times, and only for a quick glance at the furniture, and out.

This girl Sonia was also a cousin to my aunt Chashka, the wife of my father's brother Reuven which in a sense made us related by marriage, but this still did not raise my status by one millimeter.

Sonia was very active in Beitar during her summers in Shershev. In 1935 she had a problem with a tooth that developed into a needed operation and she had to return home. It seems that she had to lose a years credit, in any case she did not return to Prague. Not long after, she left for the land of Israel. Within the year of her arriving in Israel she married a close friend and in his time the most respected and looked up to bachelor in Shershev Chaim Shemesh. The very same that was the first commander of Beitar in shetl and my father's first cousin.

At times, in the unpleasant winter evenings, I preferred to stay home and play with my brother Lova (Leibl) and my two little sisters, Sonia and Liba. I loved those evenings with my family and mother's boundless love and endless affection.

One might ask; Whose mother is not loving and devoted? Surely everyone's mother is, but as for myself I will say that such unconditional love, such selflessness and self-sacrifice, I only began to understand a couple of years later with the onset of the six years long dark Nazi night. First at the beginning when I still had her and later after I have lost her.

That phenomenon, for lack of another word, or that revelation became clearer and more comprehensible to me as the years went by. I will only add that all that has been said and written about a mother and more, be it in prose or verse, was embodied in my mother.

It seems to me that this kind of devotion and love of family is innate in the Auerbach family, a trend which I hope will never disappear nor weaken. That warmth I have personally experienced when I met my relatives, the Auerbachs, in the United States.

In those evenings at home, we children at times used to sing popular or recent songs which we used to pick up in school or on the street. At times our parents used to get carried away in solo or together used to start singing Yiddish and just as often in Russian songs from their younger years, to us they sounded ancient.

Some of those Yiddish songs can still be heard from a rare Yiddish entertainer when he entertains even a rarer Yiddish understanding audience. Sometimes a Yiddish audience likes to hear a Yiddish song that they don't understand any more, but that reminds them of a lullaby that a grandmother sang to them.

I can still recall Yiddish songs that I heard from my parents which I never heard again. The songs have disappeared with the silenced voices of those who sang them.

My sister Sheva used to love to sing and use to pick up a song having heard it for the first time on the radio or on the street. Even my two little sisters Sonia and Liba were able to pick up a tune at once, one way or another there was often heard singing in our home.

Slowly I started to master the Polish language. Still I felt that it was not enough. Fortunately, for me the others, the Christian students, had the same problem and we were held back in this subject. However, because of my good performance, in mathematics, nature study, science and geography, I was considered a good student.

The holiday of Pessach (Passover) arrived almost as sudden as the warm spring weather. The snow on the flat lands began to melt faster than ever, flowing in the direction of the little river which flooded as usually in fall and froze over. Over the winter this huge lake became covered with a thick layer of snow. Now, the already flooded river with all the snow on it turning into water combining with the melting snow from all around, turned half the shtetl into a sea.

As I mentioned earlier our entire district was a flatland so the water was almost evenly distributed everywhere, covering my grandparents yard in twenty centimeters of water. There were of course houses with water covering the floors.

But because of that flat terrain the water moved away slowly without causing much damage except leaving behind many wet floors.

The spring used to create a lot of activities in and around the shtetl. The farmers used to start plowing the fields. The Jews who had gardens got busy working in the gardens. Those who had in mind to build a house started in the spring and carpenters, masons, roofers, who were all Jews, started working. The black smiths who except for one were all Jews too, got busy servicing the farmers wagons and shoeing the horses.

Shortly after Pessach (Passover), my uncle Eli was called up for army service which he was expecting for almost a year. At the same time his other friends, in fact the entire group with whom he used to spend sleepless nights and starve themselves in order to loose weight unsuccessfully, were called up, too.

The mood in the families whose young men had to go into the army was understandably depressing. My grandmother cried continuously for a week after my uncle Eli, her youngest son left. My father, as the oldest son tried to comfort her. Of how much help he was I don't know.

My uncle was sent to serve near the city of Bidgoscz, in north western Poland in the 16th regiment of light artillery.

With him from Shershev left two of his close friends; Shlome Krugman and Leibl Neibriff. Others that I remember were : Gotl Weiner, David Lifshitz, Ghrshon Krenitzer, David Kabizecky and some more whose names I don't remember.

About that Shlome Krugman I will mention something now and hope to come back to him later on. I also like to mention his family, for it is only proper that the man, Shlome's father, Chatzkel Krugman, who came up with the idea and saw it through to build a Hebrew school in Shershev. He was the moving power behind it and remained president of the school committee up to the start of the war.

They had four children. The oldest Shlome who was my uncle's age, born in 1914, a son Mulick (Shmuel) born in 1918, a daughter Chayia, a couple years older than my sister Sheva, and a youngest son Tevyeh, my age, who was with me in the same grade in the Hebrew school.

It was a year of growing anti-Semitism in Poland. The Poles did not need encouragement to follow in the steps of the Germans.

Not having anyone like a Pilsudsky to restrain them, they started their own anti-Semitic campaign.

Jews, especially young people, started looking for a way out. The majority wanted to go to the land of Israel, but in the last few years, the British government started drastically to limit and reduce the number of Jews entering then "Palestine." To add to it, the harsh persecution of Jews in Germany increased the demand for permits to go to Palestine.

There were some that got permits to go there. They were young people who belonged to the leftist Zionist organizations that were the sole disposers of those permits authorized by the British. Those privileged to get such a permit had to be a committed member of that organization known as an active member and passed a so called "Hachsharah" (a special course). Others who had there members of the immediate family, like parents or children could join them. Students with gymnasium matriculations, could go there to continue their studies in the Hebrew University and finally so called capitalists. This applied to those who could produce a thousand British pounds., which were five thousand dollars US. A huge sum for the poverty stricken ninety five percent of the Polish Jewry.

Among the couple Jews that left Shershev for the land of Israel, was our butcher from whom my mother used to buy meat all the years I can remember. His name was "Leibe Kalbkof." His youngest daughter Leah used to bring us the meat home twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays and whom my mother used to give the meat order for the next time.

That butcher, Leibe had a son or two in the land of Israel and they sent permits for the rest of the family.

How many children that Leibe the butcher had with him in Shershev, I don't remember, but besides the daughter Leah, I remember a son David, in his mid twenties.

They all left that year of 1936 for Palestine. To everyone's surprise that son David with a friend of his, Yaakov Feinbir, who left Shershev a few months earlier, returned back to Shershev some six months later.

The Jews of Shershev could not understand the fact that two young men who succeeded in getting out of Shershev and into the land of Israel could decide to return. Even today sixty years later, I still can not understand it.

One of them Yaakov Feinbir I met once in Auschwitz in 1943. He looked like all Muselmann, ready for the ovens. A couple months later I heard from an acquaintance that he is gone. The other one, David Kalbkof went through the expulsion of Shershev and perished in Drohychin in summer of 1942.

Up to the middle of the thirties there were still a fair number of "Yeshuvniks" (individual or a couple Jewish families living in villages among a none Jewish population). They lived there in an alien environment. They rarely came to the Shtetl and had little to do with the Shtetl Jews. They lived like their nieghbours, the Christian farmers. However they never missed a chance of coming for the holidays to the Shtetl to attend services in the synagogue.

Despite their isolation those same Jews held fast to their faith, observing the Shabbat, keeping Kosher and making sure that their children don't intermarry. However from the middle of the thirties even those individual Jewish families who lived among the none Jews for generations as good neighbours began to feel the spreading anti-Semitism and slowly started to move into the small and larger Shtetls in their area.

Still there remained single Jewish families or tiny groups of Jewish families consisting of from one to as many as a dozen in scattered places among the non Jewish population, up to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet union in 1941.

One of those places I visited with my father in 1936. The village was 22 kilometres northwest of Shershev by the name of Popielewo. The name was known to me from before, it has to do with a story which if I won't tell know, will never be known, it will be lost with thousands of other events that took place in the forests and swamps of Poliesie.

On a summery day in 1934 I found myself with some friends on the main street "Mostowa" when we noticed a nice carriage passing by on which next to the coachman sat a civilian with a rifle over his shoulder, which in itself was unusual for no civilian was permitted to carry a rifle or for this matter to posses one. But what was more noticeable were the two passengers sitting in the back comfortable seat of the carriage. A man and a woman. The woman, besides her height was also corpulent, but if that can be said about the woman I don't know how to describe the immensity of the man. His height would be difficult to guess as he too was sitting, but even sitting he towered over the woman, however his obesity was unimaginable.

Dispite the width of the seats he took up most of it. I had a good look at his neck which was the size of a grown man's waist.

We, boys, followed the carriage for a while admiring both, the carriage and its passengers.

Who were those two passengers of the extraordinary size?

Historically, by law, Jews were forbidden to posses land under the Czars. There were however a few privileged Jews who under extraordinary exemptions were permitted to be land owners. They, the very few, were rich Jews who once having that privilege bought entire estates. An example, the Jewish estate owner in "Wierchy" where my father ran a restaurant, or the estate of Brzezynski near Pruzany where we spent a couple summers in his cabins.

Those estates use to pass from father to son, for the Jewish owners were not permitted to sell it to other Jews and once sold to a Christian it could not return to a Jew.

After the creation of Poland the Polish government honoured the Czars law and let those few privileged Jews hold on to their land.

In the village of "Popielewo" existed a tiny Jewish community for generations. They lived apparently under the protection of the Jewish land owner who might have helped to sustain the community by keeping some of them employed and maybe interceding to the authorities on their behalf. The name of the owner of the estate was Satir. He died shortly before the end of the 19th century, leaving his estate to his two sons. One of the sons had close to a dozen children, the other had just one.

Somehow during the uncertain and stormy times of the first world war the only son of the one brother remained in the Soviet Union while all the children of the second brother stayed at home. By the end of the war the two brothers, the fathers of the children were gone and the estate was left to be run by the dozen children of the second brother. Apparently there were too many bosses around and the estate proved to be non profitable.

The Polish government used to choke the Jews with taxes and more so the Jewish land owners trying to force them to sell their land, unlike the Christian landowners who paid only a pittance. After all they were the Polish aristocracy.

The few Jewish land owners were forced to borrow and pay the exorbitant taxes, otherwise they stood to lose the estate.

Because of too many bosses and the burden of heavy taxes the estate soon found itself in a helpless situation.

On a nice summery day in the late 1920's, suddenly appeared the only son of the other of the two brothers Satir. He just arrived from the Soviet Union with enough money to bail out the estate, but with the provision that the children of his uncle, that is all his cousins, sign over the estate in his name, they can remain on the estate and work for him. Being on the verge of losing the estate they had no choice but agree.

The story that circulated about him in Shershev and vicinity was that this man Satir, worked himself up to a high place of confidence in the Soviet Union enough to have access to foreign currency and a plane with which he made good his escape across the border to Poland.

Chapter 7

He was respected by Jews and non-Jews alike, even by the Poles. To them after all, he was a Jew who was willing to forgo a high position with their mortal enemy, the Soviet Union, and live in Poland.

Still he strongly identified himself as a Jew. Married to a Jewish woman, they had no children. Whenever he used to go hunting in his forests, he made sure to shoot a deer below the knee, call for a "Shochet" (Jewish ritual slaughterer), to slaughter the animal according to Jewish law and give the deer to the small Jewish community in the village.

He was an excellent shot (marksman) and the villagers used to tell all kinds of stories about his marksmanship. I recall a farmer telling my father that he saw this man, Satir, firing at once with a revolver in each hand and hitting two match boxes at a distance of fifteen meters.

One can see such feats in movies or on stage, but in real life……

He had good reason to be good with a gun and walk or drive around with an armed guard. The Bolshevics did not forget or forgive transgressors or traitors and in their eye he was guilty on both counts.

Sure enough, a year or two later driving through his forest, someone fired from between the trees and killed him. The killer was never found.

In a sense his murderer did him a favor for when the Bolshevics came to us in 1939 and had have gotten him alive he would surely wished he was dead.

As far as I remember a couple of his cousins left for the land of Israel before the war.

Let me now go back to my trip to the village of Popielevo. Shortly before the end of the school year 1935-36, my father had to go there to collect a long overdue debt. A local farmer picked us up at five in the morning on a rainy day. Fortunately the farmer brought with him a couple spare "Zupitzy" (a man's frock with hood)that came in handy later on, for it rained intermittently all day long.

On the way we passed quite a few villages. We rested at what from a distance looked to me to be a flour mill. It turned out to be a sunflower oil pressing plant and indeed all the fields around were covered with sun flowers. Never before had I seen a sun flower press mill nor so many fields with sunflowers.

We reached Popielevo at about noon. Driving through I did not see a single Jew. After a couple hundred meters we entered a little forest. Coming out on the other side we found ourselves on the Jewish side of the village, which the Jews called the "Maydan." It consisted of about a dozen

houses. We stopped in front of one which seemed to serve as an inn. The owner took us into a room which apparently served as a synagogue, for I noticed a small Holy Ark standing in the middle of one wall.

I remember my father asking the owner when do they get a Minion. (quorum for services). The man answered: everyday. I wondered in amazement that such a small group of Jews could muster daily the ten men needed for the quorum. Also that such a small group of Jews managed to live a full Jewish life among a sea of Christians without going astray or losing a single member of the faith, considering that the nearest Jewish community was twenty two kilometers away. A long distance in those days.

For me it was an experience that awakened in me all kinds of fantasies and visions.

How many such small and even smaller Jewish communities existed in our parts of the world will regrettably never be known. The majority of them lie in the mass graves near their homes, the rest of them went up with the smoke of the crematoriums.

The Jews of Popielevo were brought to ghetto Pruzany in fall of 1941, from where they were shipped with the entire ghetto to Auschwitz. But then, in spring of 1936, who could have imagined such a night marish end?

We were served the midday meal that the owner's wife prepared. My father settled what he had with the debtor and we returned home taking another route. On the way I saw for the first time and most likely the only time a real functioning water-mill that one can now see on a picture or in fantasy.

We got home tired and soaking wet. It seems that the trip must have exposed to me new horizons, that it should remain so vividly in my mind.

The school year 1935-36 ended and my report card was better than the previous one. Again my favorite subjects like maths, nature study, geography and history put me among the better students in class. With my school report card, I went to show off to my uncle Hershl, pointing out my excellent mark in physics. I expected a shower of praise, instead he asked me calmly; and how are you getting on with your private Hebrew teacher in Hebrew, or with Polish at school? He knew my weak points. I had nothing to say. He paused and then said, when you will get such marks in languages and literature, then I will be proud of you. Physics is secondary to literature.

For me the end of the school year meant the end of grade five, but for my sister Sheva, it meant the end of attending the Polish school. She was getting ready to enroll in the Hebrew gymnasium in Pruzany. Fortunately,

she was well prepared with Hebrew, thanks to the years with the private teacher. The other subjects were no problem.

Not many children used to go to the gymnasium in Pruzany to continue their studies. It was a matter of affordability. Firstly, the tuition which was substantial, as it was a private school. Then came the problem of board and room. In my days there were no more than a dozen children from Shershev attending both gymnasiums in Pruzany the Hebrew and the Polish one. That included Jewish and non-Jewish.

The students in both gymnasiums were mostly locals. The out of towns were children of better to do families from the nearby shtetls like Kobrin, Kamieniec-Litevsk, Shershev, Maltch, Seltz, Bereza-Kartuska, Linovo and others. The Jewish children attended mostly Hebrew gymnasium for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the students were supposed to take two foreign languages, one Latin, which was compulsory in both gymnasiums and the second, which in Hebrew school was chosen to be English, to facilitate the sutdents who intended to go to the land of Israel to continue studying or to find jobs. This was the first reason to go there. The second was a much simpler one. The administration of the Polish gymnasium was not anxious to accept Jews and looked for any possible excuse not to.

But some with excellent marks did get in. Among them two of my cousins, Lisa Pinsky, my father's sister, Shendl's, daughter and Michla Kantorowitz, my father's brother, Rueben's daughter.

Their reasoning for entry into the Polish gymnasium was that; should they decide to continue to study in Poland, they could enroll in one of the five universities in Poland.

But right after the mid thirties, when the anti-semitism began to blaze in Poland uncontrollably, the students in the universities did not satisfy themselves with hurling abuse, name calling and physical attacks on their Jewish classmates, they started a campaign to force Jewish students to sit on the left of the class. The university administration went along with those demands, forcing the Jewish students to sit on the left. The Jewish students found this act of the administrations offensive and preferred to stand during the lectures than sit on the left side.

There were Jewish students in the universities that would not or could not take the abuse of their Christian classmates and quit universities in disgust.

Apparently, the antagonism and out right physical attacks of the Christian students on their Jewish classmates did not fully satisfy the ministry of education, who was trying to discourage Jewish attendance in universities.

Not wanting to make it an official law and be embarrassed in front of the democratic world, they decided to annul the validity of the Hebrew gymnasium's status as a high school and it's metriculations, by it depriving the graduates the right to be accepted into a university.

Thus they deprived thousands of Jewish youths of continueing their education. Countless Hebrew gymnasiums were put in a situation where their graduates could only apply for entry into the Hebrew university of Jerusalem.

The Jewish political as well as the economical horizon began to cloud over already in spring of 1936. The Nurenberg Laws passed in Germany a year earlier began to appeal to the Poles too. It started with propaganda not to buy in Jewish owned stores. It followed with rock throwing in Jewish homes and particular into Jewish owned business establishments. It continued with attacks on individual Jews and eventually led to the official first pogrom on Jews in the 1930's in Poland.

It happened on the 9th of March 1936 in the central Polish shtetl of "Przytek", when a well organized mass of Polish anti-semits attacked the local Jewish population breaking into their homes, helping themselves to anything of value and beating them murderously. Not being satisfied with it they broke into the Jewish stores and whatever they could not take with them, they destroyed. At the end setting fire to many Jewish homes and leaving behind three dead victims. A poor elderly watchmaker, his wife and a third man.

Despite the pleading of the Jews, the local police did not interfere. The murderers of the three Jews were never brought to justice.

At the same time Arab terror against the Jews in British controlled Palestine intensified, to which the British reacted by limiting even more the number of Jews entering the land of Israel. Especially the Jews of Germany and Poland who were trying desperately to escape the clutches of Hitler and the Polish anti-semitism. Thus abandoning those Jews to their destiny which was so fast approaching.

The then Revisionist-Zionist leader, Vladimis-Zev Zabotinsky, undertook a project to collect a million Jewish signatures to submit to the British government with a petition to increase the number of Jews applying to go to the land of Israel.

This idea brought to a lot of friction between the two main Zionist organizations. It led to fist fights,even in Shershev.

At that time there were still existing the two main Zionist organizations in our shtetl. The leftist, Shomer and the rightist Beitar.The

leader of the Beitar was a local young man by the name of Yankl(Yaakov) Judelevsky, who was a teacher in our Hebrew school. His mother, Chome-Henie, a widow for many years, was a dressmaker who worked hard to help her son in fulfilling his wish to become a teacher. She also had two daughters. The older one "Eidl" and "Mushkah." Both ardent leftists. As a result I don't assume there was a political domestic peace at home.

The "Hashomer" in Shershev was then under the temporary leadership of Avraham Aprik. I say temporary for he had just came for a few months visit from Palestine to see his father and sister "Mali," and took over the leadership of the organization.

With Avraham Aprik's coming, I learnt for the first time that he existed, that his father Pelet had even a son in the land of Israel, that he, the son, left Shershev in the late twenties and that at the same time, three sons of Yehuda Weiner left for the land of Israel.

Apparently, Zionism was well and alive in Shershev in the twenties and "Aliya" (immigration to Palestine) a fact.

The atmosphere between the two extreme sides of those organizations was already tense from before. As much as the revisionists wanted the idea of a petition to carry through even more so were the leftist set against it. To promote the idea of the petition in Shershev, the revisionist organization invited the entire community (usually the males) to attend a lecture on the benefit of the petition. It was set to take place on a Saturday afternoon in the main or large synagogue which was next to our house. This synagogue served, because of its size, as a place of functions for all kinds of activities in the Jewish community like sermons, speeches, orations and alike.

That summery Saturday held the promise of a successful gathering. Right after the Saturday midday meal, the crowd began to gather, each trying to get as close a seat as possible. Better yet, to get a seat at all. The grown up members of the Beitar, dressed in their uniforms stood in their assigned places, some inside to keep order and make sure that there are no disturbances, some at the doors to the foyer and some at the main door at the entry from the foyer to the sanctuary. The so called guard were there not only to keep order but to make sure that there is no outburst of any sort from the opposition whose members were sure to sneak in with the crowd.

As a thirteen year old, I had no function to perform, so I stood on the porch of our house and watched the large crowd of people entering the synagogue. From my vantage point I could see almost the whole market square and everybody in it. As I stood there and watched, I noticed a group of about fifteen men from the age of twenty to thirty coming into the square

from the Mostowa (main) street and walking nonchalant in the direction of the synagogue. This group of people were well known in shtetl. They were from the family of the Papalach and their cronies, with whom nobody wished to have a disagreement. They were the town's rough-necks, yet their walk seemed to be purposeful. They were followed by rows of four to six men of members of the Hashomer and Hachalutz and former active members who had outgrown the youthful activities but remained committed to the idea. I am not sure really to which one; the left Zionistic or to its strictly and only socialistic underling.

One could not see among them a younger youth then eighteen. They apparently did not want to have boys in their way.

The few uniformed Beitar members were swept aside at the outside door and the same happened at the second leading into the sanctuary. There were not enough of them nor did they dare oppose the hired hoodlums who would become their personal enemies capable of settling scores later on their own turf and time.

Breaking into the synagogue, the demonstrators with their hired helpers pulled out from under their clothes, sticks, stones and bricks and threw themselves on the surprised, confused and out-numbered Beitar youths. Their uniforms made them only more noticeable to the attackers which out-numbered them three fold.

I recall seeing my immediate superior in Beitar Motshe (Mordechai)Shocherman making his way through the throngs of pushing and shoving. His face covered with blood. The same with his friends, Shepsl and Itzel Pomeraniec, Reuben Shneider, Ghershon Levkovitz, the two brothers Shalom and Avi (Abraham) London and others.

The assembled crowd was pushing its way out from the synagogue for two reasons: firstly, not to get themselves hurt in the melee, secondly, in disgust that Jewish young men that were neighbors, went to the same Heder or school even in the same class, played together as children, could raise a hand with a stick or a stone in it with the intention of hurting one another. And for what reason? For trying to convince someone to sign a petition to the British government to increase the number of permits for Jews trying to go to Palestine, so they could get away from persecution in Germany or Poland?

Within ten minutes, the large synagogue was empty. There was no great damage done to the inside. What damage was done was to a few members of the Beitar that got beaten up and to the self esteem of the Hashomer organization in town.

By breaking up the meeting they inflicted upon themselves enough damage to become pariahs in the eyes of many people in town. In a small shtetl where everyone is either family, neighbour, or friend, such an act is not forgiven easily.

That act might have contributed to the fact that the leftist organization ceased to exist in Shershev within a year of that event.

Life in Shershev began slowy but noticebly to change for the worst. The persecution of Jews in Germany caused not only interest but concern and sympathy. Still worse, was the fact that it caught the interest of the non-Jewish population and became a source of envy. They envied the fat that in the neighboring country, Germany, anti semitism is not only open, but encouraged and supported by the government. The expression constantly heard was "wait till Hitler comes." If I could put up with anti-semitic remarks in school I could reason that they came from the mouths of children. To hear it from grown ups was depressing and frightening.

The Jewish press was full of saddening and dispiriting news. Fortunately, the non-Jewish population did little reading, but the anti-semetic propaganda found its way around the shtetl. One of the Jewish papers used to be a tabloid which used to describe far away places and exotic lands which used to awaken in me a desire for travel and to see those places. In general a desire to leave Shershev. The same tabloid triggered also the imaginations of my friends who like myself had dreams of their own.

So we spend many summer evenings walking back and forth on the main street (Mostowa) which included the market place at its extreme far side where Channania the tailor lived, corner Beth-Chayim Street and at the far end of Mostowa Street, where the Pruzaner Steet began. This part of the shtetl was totally inhabited by Jews and the only street that had a side walk. It served as a walking place or promenade for the Jews of Shershev. On a nice and warm Saturday evening, the entire Jewish population could be found there and at times it seemed that the sidewalk was too narrow to hold them all. It took the accursed Nazis to solve this problem their way.

It was on this kilometer and a half long sidewalk that we boys used to walk, plan and dream of a future.

Who knows how many more boys like ourselves walked on that sidewalk and dream equal dreams. What we do know is what became of them.

We, that is our group of boys, had another place where we used to walk and make plans for the future. That place was the meadow along the left bank of the river. It was a stretch of land a couple of kilometers long and a quarter kilometer wide, it belonged to the municipality. Summertime, it used

to get dry enough for one to walk over it without getting ones feet or shoes wet. It was of little use, too wet for cultivation and too poor for growing hay. So, there was never an argument over who shall use it. Christians had better pastures for their cattle, so they did not begrudge the Jews that poor piece of pasture.

Over that meadow, we used to walk or run daytime only, for at night it was easy to step into a puddle. Letting the wind flow through short hair, which grew during the vacation time, as we were not permitted to grow hair during the school year. With the wind in our faces or back, we walked and talked about far away places, exciting events, and the distant and wide world. Above all, however, we dreamed about a our own Jewish homeland Israel.

What would not we have been ready to do in order to realize the dream of our own independent land of Israel, to give our lives would have been a small price to pay. Who could have imagined then that a dozen years later that dream would have become a reality but hardly any of those dreamers lived to see it come through.

The news from the land of Israel was becoming more depressing by the day. There was a difference of opinions among Jews , to answer to the Arab terror or not to. The revisionist were very much for it, but the decision makers were the leftist, they had the say and part of their ideology was appeasement., which the Arabs took for weakness or outright fear.

When finally the revisionist started to respond to the Arab terror with their own, despite the difficulties they had to overcome from our own Jewish leftist betrayals, British persecution, arrest and hangings, the mood in shtetl improved even elated by the fact that Jews, given the minimum of a chance, were willing to strike back, even if they have to hang for it.

With time Jews in the land of Israel have realized that pacifism is an unknown concept to Arabs and the only other alternative is defense. They have learned it fast and well.

Enough has been written about it in its time. With all the problems, in retrospect, the summer of 1936 was for us, a pleasant one. We used to go to the nearby forest to pick mushrooms. It required a certain expertise if one was looking for the best, so called carpatian mushrooms, at which I was not so good. But I enjoyed the walk in the forest, I even tried my hand at picking blueberries, but found it boring.

We used to spend a fair amount of time swimming, or shall I say supposedly swimming, the little river "Lesna" that cut through the main street was in a couple places up the river a bit wider to some ten meters and a meter

deep. That was considered deep and wide for our river. It was there that the local population used to go "swimming".

As the bathers were bathing stark naked, the women found another hole like this one, some distance away. I will say that not only men , but youths and boys respected the womens privacy and nobody walked in that direction, as they too bathed in the nude.

One of the questions that puzzled me for a long time was: Where does the non-Jewish population bathe? The Jews had a bath house owned and used by Jews only. In summer the bathing or swimming was attended by Jews, and non Jews was a rare occasion, so where did they bath? The answer came to me later, they did not. All one needed was a nose to know it.

A couple of years before the war, some young men and women began to wear swimming shorts and suits. Some women began to come over to the mans swimming hole, I will say that when women were there, men who had no swimming shorts did not get undressed and only entered the water after the women had left. Yet men never ventured to the womens side even in shorts.

Before and after swimming, we used to lay and bask in the sun. For me it was no pleasure, knowing that my skin will soon turn red and by morning the exposed body will be covered with blisters. A day later, the blisters used to start breaking and the skin peeling painfully. A few days later, I used to do the same thing and go through the same process. I never got used to the sun. I finally learned to avoid it.

With vacation over, the school year 1936-37 began. The atmosphere at home was abit subdued,, due to the fact that my sister Sheva left to study in Pruzany in the Hebrew gymnasium. My parents found a place for her with room and board with a family by the name of Aryeh Zlotick., who himself was a conductor on one of the buses that commuted between Shershev and Pruzany, which came in handy for my parents to send to my sister whatever she needed in the shortest of time, since he used to come to Shershev three times a day.

My sister's departure was difficult on all of us for a while, until we got used to it. As for me, I am sure there were disagreements between my sister and I at times, but were smoothed over by her, she was very much like my mother, tolerante and forgiving, never knowing how to carry a grudge or be angry at anybody. True, she used to come home every Friday with the 4 o'clock bus, she and 3 or 4 other children, who attended the gymnasium in Pruzany. They all used to go back with the Saturday night bus to be in school on Sunday. My sister used to bring with her many new songs from the

bigger city which not only I, but my young brother and sisters used to pick up immediately and fill the house with songs. Saturday night, she used to go back leaving us in a rather gloomy mood. I am sure it affected my parents more than me. For I used to go playing with my friends afterwards.

There were times when the bus did not arrive or depart on time, the main problem used to be the flat tires due to the state of the road that was covered with sharp little rocks but those were small problems. A break down of the engine was a much greater problem. There were no garages in Shershev nor in Pruzany. So, all the repairs had to be done by the driver who besides being a driver had to be a good mechanic and able to make all repairs on the spot, no matter how long it took and regardless of the weather.

Just like the majority of the Hebrew gymnasiums in Poland, so has the one in Pruzany lost its official recognition as a high school. The graduates unable to enter university had one option if they wanted or could afford to continue their studies in Jerusalem. At that time, my parents did not think of higher education. My sister was just entering gymnasium at the age of just over 14 and had lots of time to think of a future.

My close friend Lazer Rotenberg, who was 2 years older than I and in the same grade as my sister went to attend a trade school in Brest-Litowsk. The school had 2 sections, one a carpenter shop and the second a lock-smith\mechanical. He entered the mechanical section. He, Lazer Rotenberg being the oldest and the strongest in our group was in a sense our defender. Of medium height, heavy muscled, broad shouldered, blue-eyed, straight blond hair, he looked nothing like the stereo type Jewish boy that one could see in the shtetl. What was obvious about him, was that he was of the Pinsky stock.

Regrettably, I don't know the whole Pinsky story, what I do know, was that there were 2 brothers Pinsky, Shalom and Joshua. Shalom had a son Laibel, who married my father's sister Sheindl (Sheine), a daughter Chashka who married my father's brother Reuben and another son Hershel who managed to get out of the Soviet Union in 1929 and returned to Shershev. Hershel did not stay in Shershev but moved to Warsaw where he perished with the ghetto Warsaw in 1942.

The other brother, Joshua, had 2 daughters, the older one Rayah and the younger Sonia. It was Rayah's two sons, Lazer and Litek that were my friends. The younger daughter Sonia, left for the land of Israel in 1935, where shortly after, she married my father's cousin, Chaim Shemesh.

Shalom Pinsky died before my time. His brother Joshua with his wife, Bluma, his daughter Rayah, her husband Joseph, and their five children; the

oldest a daughter Pola, sons Lazer and Litek and two younger daughters, Lisa and Mina left Shershev with the explusion and were slaughtered in Chomsk the first day of "Rosh Hashana "(Jewish New Year) 1942.

The Pinsky men were broad shouldered, strong, either red or blond hair and blue-eyed. My friend Lazer was unmistakingly a Pinsky. He came in handy in a brawl between us and non Jewish boys when they used to take over the sport court, so they could play ball, but not when he, Lazer was around.

Although our group was tight knit, I felt a closer friendship with Lazer than with his brother Litek, who was only 3 days older than I, as compared to Lazer who was two years older than the two of us, and with his departure, I lost a close friend.

I was now in grade six. To my surprise we received among the partly new teacher personel, a Jewish teacher. He came from Grodno by the name of "Glier." More surprised than I was, was the Jewish population who was wondering that in a time when the anti-semitism in Poland is spreading so rapidly, they sent in a Jewish teacher to Shershev. What a surprise it was for the Christian population and especially for the teacher personal I would not even try to guess. It is my assumption that the education ministry got stuck with a few Jewish government licensed teachers and the best place for them would be a far away place like Shershev in eastern Poland where the population was not Polish and the Jewish teachers would not be so visible nor would the protest be loud.

The teacher Glier rented part of Alter Geleshtein's house, brought over his wife and 4-5 year old daughter who spoke only Polish and in no time adjusted and was accepted into the Jewish community.

The grade six class, my class, he taught geography and I will say that the none Jewish students in my class did not show him the respect due to a teacher. They were much noisier than during other classes. We the Jewish kids tried to make up for it by behaving exceptionally good, knowing that the others are doing it in spite, because of his Jewishness.

Some of the teachers were being rotated after a year or two. With the small group of new teachers that arrived that year was a young and attractive woman by the name of Lapianka. It seems that she was well aware of her looks and used to dress accordingly. She always used to come into the class in a tight-fitting skirt and even a tighter fitting sweater which used to accentuate even more her provoking figure.

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I don't know for whose benefit she used to do it. Was it for the male teachers, who were to the best of my recollection all married, or for the 13-14 year old boys, her students?

How much success she had with the teachers, I do not know, but with us students she had. Many of us used to catch ourselves thinking about other things during her lesson.

With the start of the new school year we were told that new text books on the Polish language are being issued. When I opened and looked at the first pages, I realized that it contains a lot of material of a different and ugly face. On one of the first pages, taking up the entire page was the picture of a statue of Christ, standing with his hand stretched out forward. Underneath with large print was written: "This statue stands in the village of (I don't remember the name) on the place of the house where the last Jew of the village lived." How this picture effected the student, I will leave for the reader to interpret.

The book contained stories about Jews and how they swindled and cheated the poor Christians. That was a book from which we students had to learn the Polish language and prepare ourselves to life in the Polish society.

Is it surprising that anti-semitism was so rampant in Poland?

Without the protection of the gypsy Wladek Chubrewicz, the sixth grade was the hardest for me to bear The school year started the beginning of September. Shortly after, our class was informed that at the end of the month we will be taken on a trip to Bialoweza, 35 kilometers west of Shershev. It was an ancient , supposedly the largest in central Europe forest, that had the last herd of European bison in the world.

The Russian Czars have erected there a hunting lodge, that could compete with any mention in Europe. After the first world war, the Poles converted part of that mansion into a museum, while the other half served as a hunting lodge for high Polish and foreign dignitaries.

In the middle of that forest was a small town or shtetl by the same name, I don't know who took the name from whom, the forest from the shtetl or vice-versa. The majority lived from servicing the mansion, some were foresters, tourist guides and other jobs provided by the administration. A mixed shtetl, the eighty Jewish families made up half of the population. Most were tradesman, artisans and petty merchants.

We arrived there by the bus that used to go back and forth from Shershev to Bialoweza. After visiting the hunting lodge, museum, we were taken to a part of the forest where everything is being left untouched.

At the entrance to that part of the forest, we were joined by another group of students, our age. They were from further away for they spoke a pure Polish, unlike us who spoke among ourselves white Russian or Jewish.

When we reached a clearing in the forest and our guide and teachers were busy speaking to each other, I noticed that a few boys from the other group managed in the quiet to deliver a few punches to one of the couple Jewish boys from their group.

We returned home the same day. The following morning when I came back to school, I heard the boys in my class speaking with envy about the fact that the others could deliver a few good punches their Jews and their teachers pretended not to see it.

Apparently, I was not the only one to notice it and neither was I the only one to be persecuted. Some had it worse.

From that point of view, that is anti-semitic persecution the school year 1936-37 was for me the worst. Scholastically, there was the eternal race between me and the other Jewish boy, Laizer Eizenshtein, for first place in class in mathematics and physics. The other subjects were no problem except the Polish language. But this was a common problem that afflicted every one in the class.

My brother Liova (Leibl) was already in the second grade Hebrew school and I had a suspicion that my father had the same plan for him as for my sister and I. That is, to transfer him after the fourth grade into the Polish school. So on the winter mornings, we used to leave the house at day break. I used to turn right through the main street Mostowa to the Polish school and my seven year old brother Liova left through Kamieniecka Street to the Hebrew school.

Usually the main meal used to be eaten between four and five. As we used to come home from school a couple hours before it, my mother always had a snack ready for us to tie us over. The most favorite one used to be the "Potatoe Kugel" (pudding) that she used to bake in one of the two tile ovens that served to warm the house.

In the cold winter days, those ovens had to be lit twice a day. As soon as the wood in them was burned almost completely and all that was left in them were the (cinders) embers, the cast iron doors of the stoves were hermetically closed, so as to prevent the glowing embers from completely burning out to retain the heat in the stove longer.

The most preferred place in the house during the long wintery evenings, was to stand by the stove with ones back pressing against it and feel the warmth radiating from it and dispersing all over the body. The household members used to stay around the stove conversing as well as trying to solve problems, just as it is done nowadays, sitting around the table.

In such an oven, my mother used to bake the potatoe kugel (pudding) in a fair amount of animal fat. When ready, it used to be moved to the upper part of the stove where it stood hot until we came home. It was then, that my mother used to take it out from the oven, an earthen pot, narrow on the bottom and wide on top. My mother used to turn it over in the air, holding it over a flat wide plate. It used to land on the plate. A round pyramid like pudding with a flat top, a hot sweaty glistering delight that use to fill the house with the most appetizing aroma.

After the snack, I used to do my homework, which as a rule used to take two to three hours. By then, it was time for dinner. Most of the time my mother used to feed me first so that I could go to mind the store, while my father could go home to eat.

I, a thirteen year old used to remain by myself in a store with shelves full of vodka, wine and liquor, cigarettes and tobacco. It never happened that I or we had any problem with a customer even a drunk one.

Things have changed a lot since then. Who would let a thirteen year old attend a liquor store today?

As soon as my father used to come back from dinner, I used to try and sneak out, but was not always successful. He used to start asking about the lessons, homework, and others pertaining to it. When he used to let go of me, I knew I did my work well, but he never let me feel this way, just advising me to go home to read it again.

Facing our store was the house of my uncle Reuben, my father's brother, whose hardware store took up part of his house. Not daring sometimes to leave the store and go straight to my friends, I used the excuse that I was going for a little while to my uncle's house, what my father tolerated.

There I had my uncle's daughter Michla, two years younger than I, who used to be my playmate when I was five and six years old, their son Shalom, a year older than my brother Liova and their second son Shevach, born in 1935. From there I had no problem going out, as their back door led into an alley.

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My uncle Reuben was a good business man and a hard worker, I will add a successful one too. Quick to grasp modern concepts, he was the first and only merchant to buy by the truckload. The benefit was to have the needed merchandise on time, and buying in quantity meant a better price. He had three warehouses that always seemed to be full to the rim.

In the early thirties, a few Shershev men got together and bought a truck. One of them was Berl Shames, Chayim Shemesh's older brother. Berl was a single man then and lived with his father and sister Esther next door to my grandparents Kantorowitz.

Berl and his father Yosl (Josef) had a garden across the street and in it a large shed. The truck used to be kept in it, when in town. It was this truck that my uncle Reuben used to hire to bring him merchandise from as far away as Lodz. From Shershev it was across Poland.

A couple years before the war my uncle Reuben extended his business to building forester and forest ranger stations, which used to consist of a half a dozen houses, the most modern in the entire area, even with running water, that could not be found in Pruzany.

My uncle Reuben's wife, Chashka, as I mentioned earlier was from the Pinsky family, of medium height, sturdy built for a woman, blond hair and blue eyes. Their daughter, Michla inherited from her mother, the blond hair and blue eyes, from her father, his slender build but not his one meter and eighty five centimeter height. She was not much taller from her mother, but a couple of years later she developed a figure that was the envy of every girl in shtetl.

As a thirteen and fourteen year old boy, I began to take notice and an unexplainable wall began to form between us. Gone were the fights and hair pulling of the time gone by, and our friendship took on an uncomprehensible respectability to such an extent that being alone we did not dare sit next to each other, but always across, not even on the same couch.

To me and my friends the big city meant Brisk (Brest-Litowsk), which was via field road only eighty kilometers away. By the highway 110, but it might have been a thousand. I doubt if more than ten percent of the entire Shershev population had ever been in Brisk.

I have passed by Brisk several times going with my mother and sister Sheva to the village of Wierchy to visit my father and on the way to the summer resort Domaczewo. All I have seen and remembered was the rail way station.

The few students that attended out of town schools came home for their winter vacation, among them my sister Sheva and my close

friend Laizer Rotenberg. In his regulation uniform school cap, he walked befitting a big city student. We all tried it on, admiring its unique design. He kept on telling stories about the big city and we listened in awe. It was not his nature to pretend an in a couple of days, he was back, the good old Laizer we knew.

In my class of forty students, ten of us were Jews, two boys, I and Laier Eizenshtein,, my private Hebrew teacher's oldest son. The eight girls were: Lola Baumriter, Cheitche Chadricky, Nishkah Kalbkauf, Maykah London, Sara Malecky, Reshl Pomeranietz, Rivka Waldman and Feigah, her father's name was Shmuel, I forget the family's name.

During the winter of 19336-37, our group of the five boys became even closer knit. At the same time a group of five girls formed an equally tight knit circle of about the same age. The oldest Chayia Chadricky, may age was also my class mate, Lola Baumriter somewhat younger, she too was my class mate. The other two Mayah Maister and Sheina-Rivka Granat were a year younger then I and my cousin Michla, the youngest of the group two years my junior.

It is unclear to me now, how we boys started coming into Mayah Maister's house and met the girls. I would not doubt that it was deliberate. The fact remains, that it became an often occurance. True, we never came singly, but always in a group. Nor did any one of us meet a girl by ourselves. Such a thing was unheard of in Shershev, not in my days. One could see in the street an eighteen or nineteen year old couple but not younger.

It took another year before we boys and girls, dared to go out on a Saturday night walk together. Not G-d forbid as couples but as a bunch. That took care of Saturday evenings. The remaining evenings of the week, if not in the local of the Beitar, we boys, used to sit and talk, talk without end, about Zionism, about the unrest that time in Palestine, about growing anti-semitism in Poland, persecution of Jews in Germany. There was no shortage of topics to talk about. It is my opinion that we were much better informed about world affairs than boys of fourteen nowadays.

And so went by the winter of 1936-37. With the arrival of spring, a series of decrees were issued applicable to Jewish home owners. The main street, Mostowa was inhabited by Jews only. Suddenly the Poles decided to modernise it. They issued orders to all home owners to replace the wooden sidewalks, that served Shershev for a hundred years, with cement ones. This order applied also to the half of Ostrowiecka Street which too

was inhabited by Jews and the market square, which was the town's and Jewish center.

This (order) decree was accompanied by an even more oppressive demand. Namely, that all those houses on those very streets are to be painted in either dark green or blue grayish colours and if any of those houses are more than a meter away from the sidewalk, which ninety five percent were, are to put up a fence in front and flowers to be planted behind the fence. The fences are to be all of the same size and shape and of the same colour as the house.

The paint used in our part of the country had a lin-seed-oil base with the needed colour added. The thick wooden walls of our houses used to soak up dozens of liters of the paint, putting a heavy financial burden on the poor Jewis inhabitants of the shtetl if compounded with the other decrees. They had no choice but comply. Otherwise, they face exorbitant fines.

No sooner did the Jewish community comply with one decrees, others followed soon. For example, all the chimneys were to be whitewashed and stay white. All the street gutters were to be whitewashed and to always stay this way.

I challenge anybody to keep a chimney white while constantly cooking or heating the house with wood. Better yet, whitewash a street gutter and see what it looks like after a rain.

Sure enough, as soon as a a rain stopped the five local policemen were out in the street writing out fines.

The streets of Shershev were paved with cobblestone. It is only natural that beteen the stones grass will attempt to grow. An order came to get rid of the grass.

One could see along the Jewish streets and market place, grown men, women and children standing bent over, squatting on their knees or plain sitting on the ground with knives trying to get the stubborn grass roots out from between the closely set stones.

It was a futile attempt. After wrestling with the roots in a most uncomfortable position, be it bent over squatting or on your knees on the stones for a couple of hours , one could clear 3-4 square meters and move on the next day abit further. However, by the time you finished clearing your piece of road which was not even yours, the space you cleared when you started a week ago, was sprouting new grass, and your entire effort was futile.

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Entire hords of inspectors and commissioners descended on Shershev and I have heard on all shtetls around. They consisted of not single individuals but came in twos, threes, and more. This time, however, they came with a special purpose, to extract from the Jews as much money as possible and be able to do it keeping a straight face. For example, every scale had to be inspected and so their weight and punched with the inspector's emblem. It was done every year.

This year, however, an entire group came, setting up a workshop and disqualifying every scale as well as every weight. Their own workers supposedly repared the scales and adjusted the weight and were charged exorbitant prices for those repairs, close to the prices of new ones. The poor Jewish shopkeepers had not choice but pay. There was nowhere to go to complain for such an outrageous blatant robbery which they knew was sanctioned by the government.

Other commissions found other ways of squeezing out every zloty from Jews. About those I will explain later.

In the spring of 1937 was opened the first co-op store in Shershev, which was the imaginative invention of the government to deprive the Jewish petty storekeeper of his livelyhood. In the town square were two non Jewish homes, in one of them that co-op was opened. With the prevailing anti-semetic atmosphere and wink from the local officialdom, some local Christians bought shares in this endever and encouraged others to buy there. In the windows of the co-op store were hung big signs calling on the population not to buy from Jews. Needless to say that many went along with such propoganda.

It did not take long before another co-op opened down the main street.

This event had no consequence effect on our business. But it effected very much the Jewish petty store keepers, maybe more morally than materially.

In the villages around, where single or a couple Jewish families lived side by side with their Christian neighbours for generations, there always existed the desire of those Jews to move into the shtetl. The reasons being the difficulty in keeping a Jewish or Kosher home, giving children a Jewish education and of course, finding a match for a child. There was no thought of inter marriage.

Because of all those reasons, those who could manage, used to move to the shtetl as long as they could find a way of making a living.

There were those, however, that after a lifetime spent in the village, did not have enough to be able to move, so they sat there.

In the later thirties, the life of some of those Jews was put in danger. I recall a case when in the village of Hallen, two dozen kilometers from Shershev, the village people tied at night the door of an olderly Jewish couple so it could not be opened from the inside and set the house on fire. They were betting that the old couple will not be able to get out through the windows. They did, thus saving their lives..

Still there remained a fair amount of Jews scattered in some villages, particularly where there were few families in the village, like the villages of Suchopola, Chwalow,Popielewo and other all within a radius of twenty kilometers of Shershev.

That spring of 1937 my uncle Eli, my father's youngest brother, came home on furlough from the army. He came in full military attire with a sword on the belt.

Naturally the entire conversation revolved around his service. About the sleeping accommodation, food, treatment by fellow soldiers, lower and higher ranking officers. From among his stories, I will mention this one: a couple months after he was drafted, they picked out all those soldiers who had gymnasium metriculations, (there weren't many in Poland) to be taken into officer's school. This law was applicable to every draftee. However, in 1936 the law was unofficially changed. Jews were rejected, and so was my uncle.

Some days later my uncle found himself for a minute alone with his no less than captain who said to him ; "Kantorowicz, do not think it was an oversight from above that they did not take you to officer's school.. They knew what they were doing, for I protested and told them that you would make a good officer. I don't have to tell you, you know the reason."

My uncle served in the light artillery, the 16th Regiment stationed in the city of Bidgoszcz, north western Poland. One of the most important functions in the artillery is that of the aimers. It has to do with mathematics. He being the most suitable was assigned this job, which gave him a certain respect in his battery and among his immediate lower rank commanders. So they did not pick on him because of his Jewishness.

There were in Shershev quite a few bachelors for whom it was time to get married. They were sons of business people or store keepers. Those young men had no vocation, and to learn a trade was beneath their dignity. So they waited until a matchmaker will find them a girl or match

from another shtetl and with the dowry, which was almost obligatory, they would set themself up in some kind of business, or an established father of the bride could take the son in law into his own business.

Some of those available bachelors were already occupied in their either own business, or in their father's family ones. None in a way, set and waited for manna to fall from heaven.

Three of those most eligable, visible and prominent bachelors in shtetl were: my uncle (father's brother) Hershl, Israel Tzemachowicz, the "Shochet" (ritual-slaughterer) son and Berl Shames, my father's and uncle Hershl's cousin. Those three bachelors were the closest friends and were always together. I can recall the time as a child, as they walked as a group with girls, in time the girls got married and the three of them remained single.

They did not get together during the week, each being involved in their own business. My uncle Hershl, in his father's, my grandfather's hardware store which required his full attention. Israel Tzemachowicz who used to buy up the hides of animal his father used to slaughter and others too and sell it to the tanneries and Berl Shames was one of the partners to the only truck in Shershev that used to haul freight to and from Shershev.

In spring of 1937 Berl Shames made the first step to break up the trio. He married a local girl, Hellkah Roselewsky, Chaikl Roselewsky's daughter.

That Chaikl Roselewsky spent some years in the U.S.A. and came back with apparently a nice bit of money. Enough to build himself a house that held a few tenants. One was the court house, which was closed a few years before the second world war, that part of the house served for a while as a Beitar local. In that house lived also a family Yaakov-Yeshayou Kwelman. Yet there was enough room left for the owners, Roselewsky family.

I guess that this Chaikl did not spend his last dollar, for as far as I remember he had no visible source of income, yet they lived comfortably, at least the last ten years before the outbreak of the second world war.

It looks as if that trio finally decided that it was time to get married. Shortlky after Israel Tzemachowicz got married, and after him my uncle Hershl.

My uncle Hershl married a girl from Kamieniec-Litewsky, her first name was Shaine, the family name I do not remember. All the grown ups attended the wedding, which took place in Kamieniec-Litewsky. But we children stayed home.

Kamieniec-Litewsky was not much bigger than Shershev, but its Jewish population was twice as large. There was a large yeshivah (an institute of higher talmudic learning) whose majority of students were American young men, who came to study and get "smicho" ordained and go back home.

Many of the Kamieniec-Litewsky Jews made a living from those American students for from the students of the surrounding shtetls they could not have existed

I still remember when my uncle Hershl brought his bride home. Her name Sheina (beautiful) fitted her accurately. Of tallish stature, rounded in all the right places, rosy cheeks on a milky white skin and a good ten years younger than he.

My uncle Hershl and his wife Sheina moved in with my grandparents, taking up the same three rooms in which we lived ten years earlier. The reason my uncle came to stay in Shershev was that it was hard for my grandfather to look after the hardware store by himself. So my uncle stayed on for a year until his brother, my uncle Eli came back from military service. Only then did my uncle Hershl move with his wife to Kamieniec-Litewsky where he became a partner in his father in law's business which was called "Packter" (those who used to lease land and cows from estate owners and produce cheese.) The cheese produced in those "Packts" were of a special kind. It looked, smelled and tasted like real Swiss cheese. It was sold under such a name and was too expensive for most of the local population. It went for export.

I was particularly close to my two youngest uncles Heshl and Eli. It was Hershl who taught me to rid a bicycle a few years earlier. He used to leave his father, my grandfather alone in the store in the hot summery afternonns and run after me holding on to the bicycle, so I should not fall. I am sure he would rather sit in the store where it was much cooler than outside. The walls of the store were a meter thick and the heat never penetrated them.

In fact it was so comfortable to be in those stores in the hot summer days, that some people used to come in to have a chat about the political situation that was becoming more and more threatening. At the same time, cool off for a bit in the coole enclosure of the store.

Among my friends, I will mention another friend of mine, Moishe Gelman and indeed he and his father's hair were yellow. He was a year older than I. He had a sister a couple of years younger by the name of Bunia and still a younger brother Chaim. His father Meir was a tailor. However, as a

tailor in Shershev, he was considered to be a well to do man. Besides the fact that he had a few young men as apprentices, he was considered the best mans tailor in Shtetl and was always loaded with work, despite his higher labour charges. It was he who used to make my yearly suits for Pessach (Passover.)

His wife Yente too was a dressmaker and she too had a couple girls working for her. Being busy as her husband, there is no wonder that they made a nice living.

That Meir Gelman loved gardening, especially flowers and in spring he used to leave his work to his assistance and give himself up with life and soul to his flowers. It is quite possible that his was the nicest flower garden in town. It was a pity that the garden was behind the house and could hardly be seen by passerbys. Maybe he did not do it for show but for the love of it.

The narrow part of the house in which end was the parlor, was completely surrounded by flowers. Two of its windows were looking out to the back, right onto the beautiful flower beds. Along this narrow side of the house Meir Gelman planted grapes. Its vines climbed along the light-weight scaffolds, erected half a meter from the house, up to the top of the roof. There was just enough room to open the windows and inhale the fragrant smell of the flowers.

The two of us, that is, I and my friend Moishe Gelman, used to spend a lot of time in that parlor on rainy days, in front of the open windows protected from the rain by heavy grape leaves, watching the warm rain drops falling and being soaked up by the sea of flowers. I used to get a feeling of comfort, protection, even security. It must have been there that I developed a liking, even an affection for a summer rain.

Still, my closet friend and confident at that time was Kalman Kalbkoif. He was the son of Hershl and Yente. His sister Nishka was in my grade in school. There were three more smaller children in that family whose names I do not remember. What we shared together was our dream of travelling to far away places and our hope of a Jewish homeland. To realize our dream we even started to build a small boat as soon as Laizer Rotenberg came home on his vacation. We worked at it the entire two month vacation. It is now a waste of time to describe how difficult and futile our effort was. Cutting the timber and making the molding to fit the frame, which took us the two months holiday. Yet nobody was happier and more enthusiastic than us boys, doing what we thought was materializing our dream. AH! Those youthful years.

That summer every man and some women became a politician. If they ran out of world politics, there was always something to complain about

the local "Kehilah" (leadership of the local Jewish community), In fact, the leadership or the Kehilah was in the neighboring Pruzany, which took in all the neighboring shtetls, like Shershev, Linovo, Malech, Seltz and a couple others. Each of those shtetls, had two representatives in the Kehilah but the majority members were local, that is Pruzany residents.

The members were being elected every couple of years democratically in shtetl, never-the-less it used to cause dissatisfication.. How else can it be in a democracy? Interestingly that in Shershev the same two men were elected time after time. They were: my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel Kantorowicz and my friend's father Meir Gelman (the flower lover). From time to time Gelman used to be replaced by Chazkl Krugman.

There lived in Shershev a shoe maker (among dozens of others) Meir Chayim. A very tall man with unusual strength, besides his strength he had a loud voice. All week long he worked long hours to provide for his wife and many children. Out of habit he used to be up at six in the morning, sitting in his favourite place, on the doctor's porch in the market square . His voice thundering half way across the shtetl.

The doctor who did not have to and did not want to be awakened this time of morning, told him to move on, but next Saturday morning, Meir Chayim was back in his favorite place, preaching world politics. I doubt if he could read, so he spoke about the shtetl politics, Kehilah politics and just talked. Nobody wanted to start a discussion with him for fear of getting a punch in the nose, If even not, they preferred to be on his good side.

That summer I spent a lot of time in the store reading books sitting behind the shelves. There I could sit undisturbed as long as I wanted, as long as I was reading. My father never interrupted me while I was doing my homework or reading. I read lots, at times a book a day.

The only bit of work I used to do sometimes was to help my father unpack the cases with vodka and put the bottles on the shelves. It used to come in solid wooden cases packed in straw. After the bottles were out of the cases, the straw was put back into the cases, the covers hammered on and put behind the shelves to wait for the next trip.

We had a steady wagon-dryer or coach-man. A husky fellow in his late twenties. He lived with his olderly parents and a single sister in a small house at the end of the main street Mostowa. He was the sole provider for his family. Twice a week he used to drive with his horse and wagon to the station of Linovo or Oranczyce as it was called in Polish, a distance of thirty kilometers, where he used to pack up the vodka and drive back home. He used to leave Shershev at midnight to be there in the morning. Pack up all

the bottles in the wooden cases and leave for home in late afternoon, arriving back in Shershev at midnight. The next morning he used to leave for Pruzany for a load of groceries. This is how the young man worked to provide for his parents and sister.

One summer evening this wagon-dryer, his name was Shepsl Rudnicky, comes in to us and in his always polite manner and voice, turns to my father and says: "I came to ask you a favor." It was an unusual thing to hear. He went on to explain that he and a few others got together and are buying a truck, with which they intend to haul freight from Shershev to Brest-litowsk and Warsaw. However he is short a couple of hundred dollars to put up for his share and he was wondering if my father could extend to him a loan for this amount. Of course, he promised to pay back as soon as he can.

A couple of hundred dollars was a big some of money in those days, especially I Shershev. I can still see as my father exchanged glances with my mother, walks away into my parents' bedroom and comes back with a handful of dollars. (People in our parts of the world used to put their trust in U.S. dollars, not in the bank). Handing it to Shepsl. He took it, counting over slowly and carefully, put it in his pocket. Thanking my parents nicely but not profusely and turns to go out. Just before the door he stopped, turned around, we could hear a reluctant sigh come from his throat and with sincere words and difficulty said : Mr. Kantorowicz (it was the first time I heard him address my father as Mr. Kantorowicz. He usually used the Jewish word "Reb" Itzik, that is Mr. Isaack.) I worked myself up from a horse and wagon to a truck, should I fail, will I be able to end up at least with a horse and wagon?

It turned out that his ordinary fellow was more foresighted than most of the considered smart members of our community. He did pay in his share of the partnership, but hung on to the horse and wagon with which he continued to earn his meager existance. With his share of the income from the truck he was paying up his loan.

Two years later, when n 1939 the Bolshevics came, they took away the truck. They called it "Nationalized" without any compensation. That Shepsl held on to his horse and wagon. He did however pay up during that time his loan to the very last cent before the war.

A hard working Jewish young man, one of hundreds of thousands whose fate has so mercilessly wronged.

One of the things the Non-Jewish locals feard more then the Jews was a thunderstorm, which was accompanied with thunder and lightening.

As the farmers buildings had thatched roofs, a lightening would set it on fire and engulf the building within seconds in flames. It used to happen so fast that at times the farmers had no chance to let the animals out of the stable. Any little breeze would carry the sparks to adjoining buildings and neighboring ones setting ablaze other farms too.

The Jewish homes were covered with wooden shingles which were more resistant to lightening. There was the voluntary fire brigade, for some reason consisting of only Jewish men. Their equipment was outdated with half a dozen hand operated pumps and some twenty horse drawn barrels mounted on a single axles with two wheels.

As there were a few wells in shtetl, there was a chronic shortage of fire hose. The hauling water in the barrels from other wells were more of a hindrence than a help.

Finally 1937 Shershev got its own motor pump with enough hose to reach from the river to any point in shtetl. A year later Shershev got its own fire engine, a brand new shining vehicle, even more modern than in the larger neighboring town Pruzany. It was not predestined for Shershev to enjoy it too long. A year later, when the war broke out the Polish government also mobilized among all private vehicles consisting of the only two buses, the two trucks, also the municipal fire engine.

That spring 1937 the government decided to open a health center in town. They started looking for a suitable place. It had to consist of four roomy bright rooms in centre of town easily accessible consisting of a waiting room, an examination room and the two remaining room for a nurses living quarters.

They liked our house. Besides being centrally located. It had four rooms all facing the front, two front entrances to serve as one for the clinic and the other as a private entrance for a nurse.

A representation from the district came, looked over our house and the four rooms they needed. After a short discussion among themselves, they made my fater an offer. It must have been a tempting one, for my father, after talking it over with my mother immediately accepted it.

A carpenter closed up the three door that connected the front four rooms to the others and we moved all the furniture over to the remaining rooms, Now we had only four rooms and the kitchen. There was no room left for a maid. It was the first time that I could remember that my mother had to do without one. Surprisingly, my mother managed without one. She was no more busy without one as with. That is, she was just as busy from the moment she got out of bed early in the morning until she went to bed. I

can not remember my mother sitting idly for one moment while there was a maid, nor did she sit down doing nothing after the maid left. I will say in all honestly, that I have come to the conclusion a long time ago, that the lot of the housewives even in the better to do households, was a harder one than that of their husbands, the providers.

True, I did not realize it then, but much later I began to draw a parallel between those two segments of society. For an example, I will take my own parents. While I mentioned already that my mother never stopped for a moment, in contrast my father opened the store at eight in the morning sitting and waiting for a customer to come in. Serving the customer required little effort. All he had to do was to hand him the bottle and collect the money. True in the busy season when in fall a lot of weddings use to take place and the sales used to come up to a hundred bottles per customer, the bottles had to be packed in sacks between straw to withstand the rigor of the road to a far away village. To do it, one needed a special skill which my fathers possessed in those days. He truly worked hard most of the year. However, he had time to read the newspaper and discuss the news with friends and acquaintences, who were all trying to solve the world problems.

Not to mention that some used to come in during the hot summer day, as the store was cool as if air conditioned.

In contrast my mother and other housewives spend that time in a hot sweltering kitchen where the iron cust plate on the cooking stove was making the heat unbearable to stand.

Coming back to the renting out part of our house. We no longer had a front entrance to our part of the house. We had to use the lane between our house and that of our neighbor Nachman Feldman, who too, used the same lane as an entrance to his house.

There were in Shersev four brothers by the name of Gluszko, of Russian orthodox faith, they for some reason dabbled in other Christian faiths. Some changed to Catholicism and later to Protestantism. Evantually, they came back to their original faith. Being fairly well educated and well to do, as they inherited a flour mill and a saw mill, they were considered aristocrats of sorts.

They fitted this description. All tall, impressive and good looking, they had that kind of air about them. The youngest and most handsome was still a bachelor. He could not find a good looking enough and befitting enough girl in and around Shershev. So he set out for further pastures.

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Sure thing, a while later he came back already married, with a girl whose beauty I would not even attempt to describe. The local population could not get their fill of looking at her. When the two of them used to walk by in the streets, every head used to turn their way.

This young woman was a nurse and she got the job in the clinic. The two of them moved into our house, in the two rooms designated for the nurse.

Two country wide boycotts were taking place at the same time in Poland. One led by Jews against buying German merchandise. One could see signs in the Jewish store windows, written in Polish and Yiddish. It proclaimed: 'We don't buy German merchandise." The stores, some of them so small that they had no windows, had the same signs nailed onto the doors.

The second boycott, much more intensive, more serious, and much more effective was led by the Polish "Endeks". An anti-Jewish Nazi sympathizing movement sponsored by the Polish government which was trying hard to deprive the Jews of their livelihood.

There were two roads leading from Shershev to the provincial town of Brest-Litowsk. One led through forest, sand and fields, but the distance was only eighty kilometers. The other road by thirty kilometers longer was cobble-stoned and led via Pruzany. On this road half way between Shershev and Brest-Litowsk was a shtetl by the name of Kobrin. The population of some twelve or thirteen thousand was eighty percent Jewish. With such a proportion of Jews, it was only natural that almost all the stores and stalls were owned by Jews.

Before entering the town of Kobrin, one had to pass a large meadow on either side of the road. That late spring of 1937 the government started building booths and stalls on that meadow. It did not take long to put them up and the government started renting them out to Christians only. No Jew was permitted under any circumstance. The farmers from the surrounding villages were used to travel to the center of town, to the market square, continued to do the same, ignoring the newly erected stores on the meadow.

Understandably, the stores there were not doing well.

That summer, on a Monday morning, which was a market day, the police closed up all the streets leading into town, ordering the farmers to unhitch their horses on that meadow. By it discouraging the farmers from going into town to get their supplies. As a result depriving the Jewish store keepers and petty dealers of their livelihood.

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They succeeded to a degree. I say to a degree, for they had neglected to realize that the farmers depended on the Jews as much as the Jews depended on the farmers.

As almost all the tradesmen in the Shtetls of Eastern Europe were Jews, the farmers depended on the Jewish artisans and craftsmen. The most primitive farmer needed a blacksmith to repare his wagon, shoe his horse, a shoe maker, tailor, seamstress, carpenter, mason, wagon wheel maker. Not to mention more sophisticated trades.

But most of all were the Jews needed to buy up the farmers surplus produce. Were not for the Jews in the small and large towns, the farmer would not have a buyer for his produce. Thus would not have the few zloty to buy the needed commodities.

I believe that there could have been a quiet and even a harmonious co existence between the Jewish and non Jewish population were it not for the outside or government interference and church contribution.

The farmers left their horses outside the town and carried their produce on their backs into the shtetl. Being as happy with the new decree as the Jews.

A proposition was brought before the Polish parliament to prohibit the Kosher ritual slaughter of animals. The instigator was a certain Madame Pristor. She moved heaven and earth to get the decree passed.

Jews appealed, protested, written petition, tried to explain and justify the practice on religious grounds.

Unfortunately, the ingrained anti-semitism in the parliament was stronger then the economical common sense, the sense of tolerance, justice or respect for other faiths.

The justification of cruelty to animals was a joke, for we could all see how every farmer used to slaughter his pig or pigs. It could turn sick even the strongest stomach. They loved to drink the fresh warm blood of the pig, so they drained it off blood while still alive. Then try to chop off his head with an ax while he was twisting and wriggling missing several times. Nor would the head come of with one or two strikes. That however, was considered humane.

Eventually the parliament compromised to a degree, by allowing a certain amount of cattle to be slaughtered according to Jewish religious law, but the total was minimal. After coming to this agreement the government let it be known that the total meant animal on the hoof. Knowing well that Jews are not permitted to eat the hind part of the animal. That cut in half the amount of meat already agreed on at the negotiations.

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During the centuries of persecution Jews have learned to improvise. There is a law that permits to eat the hind of the animal if every piece of vain is plucked out. The problem is that after such a cleaning the meat is so shredded that it is suitable for hamburgers only.

The only benefactors of that law were the Polish inspectors that used to visit the Jewish butcher shops very frequently to make sure that the butchers are not selling unlicensed meat. The inspectors however, were not immune to bribes. Knowing the severity of the fine for selling unlicensed meat they used to extract every grosz (penny) from the already impoverished butchers.

The non-Jewish local population was of two opinions. They resented the Polish patriotic anti-semetic propaganda, still its anti-semetic contents in it appealed to them. A small part of the population hated anything Polish, even their anti-semetic propaganda. Sympathizing with the Soviet Union, which meant Russia to them, their own people.

I do not want to go into the details of what the Jewish students and graduates of universities had to go through. I do want to tell a story of one Jewish university graduate from Shershev that I knew personally.

There lived, for my time, on Ostrowiecka Street, an olderly couple, Shalom-Yosef and his wife Chayie-Rantshe Farber. Shalom-Yosef was a sheet metal worker all his life, making sheet metal utencils, containers, chimney tube and alike. They had a son and a daughter. The son David was an unusually bright child. Having finished the seventh grade Polish (public) school , he was smart enough to try and give himself a better future than what he could expect if he would remain in Shershev. With his marks he was accepted in the Polish gymnasium in Pruzany. His father could not afford to keep him there nor to pay the tuition. So David began to give private lessons after school and with those meager earnings he put himself through gymnasium graduating with the highest marks in school. With those marks he was immediately accepted to the faculty of law at The Warsaw University where he graduated just before the persecution of Jews started in mid thirties.

He did his "internship" in Pinsk. After finishing he travelled to Warsaw to face the panel of examinees, that consisted of well known lawyers in the capital, members of the Polish elite. They did not pass him.

It happened that my father was in Pinsk in 1938 and visited that David Farer in his modest office whose walls where full with shelves laden with books about Polish juristical laws. He told my father to pick out at random a book, open at any place and read one sentence while he, David, took it over and continued from memory until my father told him to stop.

He tried a few more books and the same thing happened. My father realized that that man had memorized the entire collection of the Polish juristical laws, a feat my father never stopped talking about.

Despite the difficulties life went on. A couple young men had succeeded to leave for the land of Israel. They were from the early core of the "Ashome Hatzayir" (young Zionists) and the leadership of this organization felt that they owed them this much.

For Revisionist-Zionists all the official and legal roads were closed. Only a trickle managed to get through the so called "Alyia-Beth" (the underground route). It was a difficult and dangerous way.

There was in Shershev a Yehudah Weiner, who had three sons in the land of Israel. I wrote about the three Weiner brothers earlier. This Yehudah Weiner had three more sons in Shershev. The oldest Gotl, was nine years older then I and was in the short lived Polish German war together with my uncle Eli. The second son Rafael was three years older than I, and the youngest Pinchas, a year my junior. The middle one Rafael made an attempt to get to Palestine in 1938 via the underground. He got as far as Constancia Rumunia and missed the boat. A second one was being readied to depart some months later. As there was no definite time, that Rafael returned back home to Shershev. He never made a second attempt. He went through the expultion of Shershev and perished in Chomsk on Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) in 1942.

As the "Ashomer" (Left Zionist) ceased to exist a couple of years earlier, we began to feel a lack of enthusiasm among Beitar members too. The realization that a member of Beitar had no chance to get a permit to go to Palestine, the shortage of inspiring leaderhip and with the older members asumming responsibility for older parents, others being called up for military duty and still others thinking about their own future and marriage. The teenagers lacked the experience needed for leadership, led to the eventual closing of the Beitar local.

I and my friend Kalman Kalbkoif assumed the official leadership. A leadership without a following. It was a loose membership without a local for getting together for meetings. All we did was to keep contact with the head command in Warsaw, send them in the couple of zloty monthly, just to keep in touch with them. But for all intent and purposes, the Beitaar indeed ceased to exist.

In our correspondence with Warsaw. I used to sign as "Mfaked" (commander) and Kalman as secretary. All the correspondence, records, stationery I kept in our attic. A fact that could have landed us in Siberia

when the Bolshevics came. I will however deal with it at the appropriate time.

That summer we made a half hearted attempt to build our boat, but our earlier enthusiasm was missing. The hours we spent working were more mechanical than creative. Deep in his heart, each of us felt that we are laboring in vain, but nobody wanted to be the first to say it aloud.

It came to an end when the school year started. Leizer Rotenberg, our driving force went back to Brest-Litowsk and we went back to school.

Through the summer, our store more than any other, served as a gathering place for store keepers that could leave their store under somebody elses attendance, or even close it completely for a while, knowing that they won't miss out much by locking the store. For them a customer was a scarcity and a sale even more so. So instead of spending long hours in the tiny sweltering little four by four store waiting for a customer that won't show up, they used to close it and come over to us knowing that they will always find someone and exchange news, local and worldly.

Besides those I mentioned above, there were a few young men who did not do a thing but sit and wait for a girl with a large dowry. These few, I would call simply idlers or loafers. Not having what to do, they used to come in and spend the time with their peers.

One could hear true news, and half-truths, assumptions and wishfull-thinking. Anything one wanted or did not want to hear. After every lengthy discussion one would turn to my father and ask? "Nu, what do you say Yitzik (Isaak)?" One would think that my father had a direct line to every government leader.

Coming home, my father used to repeat and share with my mother some of the conversations he heard during the day. Some were sensible, some naïve, some crazy.

It was no secret to all that Germany was arming itself and that Hitler was building a huge and powerful army. Any conversation inevitably turned to talk of war. A topic familiar to my parents, as they have experienced it first hand twenty years earlier, in the first world war. My father was a soldier in the Czar's army and my mother about hunger and deprivation under German rule in 1915-18.

I will admit that their stories used to trigger my imagination and awaken in me all kinds of fantasies in which I used to be the hero.

My father being born in 1892 was drafted into the Czar's army in 1913, spending a year in Kazan, the capital of the Tatars Russia. There he

had a hard time convincing the locals that he is a Jew, as they believed that Jews grew horns.

When in August 1914 the war broke out my father's regiment consisting of three thousand men, was sent west and took up positions near the now Polish city of Lublin. As it is well recorded in history, in the beginning of the war, the Russian army had tremendous successes against the Austrian. The so called Russian steamroller moved ahead. Still, even in retreat, the Austrian inflicted heavy losses on the Russians.

Here is an episode as told to me by my father. I have no reason to disbelieve a single word, for my father was no braggart nor a boaster.

Arriving at the front they were ordered to dig in and reinforce the trenches with logs from nearby woods. A couple days later they moved up and had to build new ones. When they used to have their trenches finished, they used to receive up to a thousand cartridges a day and ordered to expend them by firing towards the enemy. It did not matter if there was even the slightest chance of hitting a target or not, they were supposed to use up the amunition.

To fire off this many bullet from the long barrelled first world war rifles, was no easy task. After a couple dozen shots the shoulder starts to ache, after a couple hundred it starts to swell. My father noticed that when a superior is not around the soldiers, they, the soldiers, would bury the cartridges in the ground under their feet and he started doing it to. An example of a wastefull, squanderish and corrupt leadership.

A few weeks after being in the front lines, my father and three more soldiers were sent on a reconnaissance mission behind the Austrian lines. They succeeded to cross behind the enemy lines. However, on the next night they were unable to get back to their line. They were forced to remain behind the enemy lines 4-5 days with no food, hiding out in forests and swamps, until they made their way back.

Their company was hidden in a forest. As soon as they arrived the company commander ordered the company to fall-in and began to inspect their riffles. Understandable, after hiding out for a few days in holes and swamps, their riffles were dirty. They were ordered to step forward, their riffles were inspected again and the inspecting officers gave my father a slap in front of the entire company.

This act was considered an insult to the soldier. But the officer dared to do it knowing that for slapping a Jew even in uniform, he won't be prosecuted. My father added that he could hear some soldiers behind him were grinding their teeth and under their breath whispering "ubyiey

yevo."(kill him) He did not dare even to raise a had knowing that for such an act he would pay with his life in war.

It is much known in western Europe and the western hemisphere about the senseless slaughter that took place on the western front during the first world war, but little or not enough of the millions senselessly destroyed on the eastern front, especially on the Russian side.

Here is an episode in which my father was a participant and told it to me personally.

Not long after the event with the reconnaissance incident, his regiment found itself near some village where they dug in. Even though the Austrians were moving back they left behind a strong rear-guard which his regiment was trying to take. They used to run towards the Austrian position with bionetts at ready and shouts of "hurrah." The Austrians used to mow them down with machine guns. After every attack his regiment was driven back to their trenches.

As the Russian trenches were within the perimeter of the village, the Austrians set the village ablaze exposing in darkness of the night the entire Russian position. It did not take long for the Austrian range finders to find the Russian Tranches. They unleashed an artillery barrage whose every shell hit the trench. There was no more thoughts of an attack. Everybody, officers, soldiers tried to save his own life. The shells were exploding right in the trenches where the pile of bodies kept on rising. Some soldiers used to try and run back, but were cut down by the Austrian machine guns. Others yelled loud and clear "Poddaymossa" (lets surrender) Despite the presence of the officers, some tried to do it despite the incoming fire which made the attempt hopeless.

The pile of twisted, torn bodies kept on growing. Suddenly my father felt a tug at his coat. He turned to see a soldier that was crouching near him pointing to an officer. It was the same one that slapped my father a couple of weeks earlier. The soldier yelled above the sound of exploding shells; Now it is your chance to get even with him. Under the constant cannonade of exploding shells and staccato of machine guns, when every still living soldier tried to find a hole among the twisted torn bodies of his comrades, nobody would have heard if my father would have pulled the trgger and fired.

The Austrian did the job for him. Less than half an hour later a shell fell close by. When the smoke cleared the first thing my father noticed was an officer's cap. Nearby over fresh bodies lie the body of that officer with half his head torn away.

Unable to surrender or go to the back, for to stick out his head one would have his head shot off, every one tried to dig his way deeper among the corpses. So did my father. At dawn, my father dug his way out from among the corpses and began to run towards the rear. In his favor was the fact that he ran eastwards toward the rising sun, which made it difficult for the Austrians to take aim. Running, he could see bullets kicking up the ground to his right and left. The ground was full with Russian dead and wounded. Some that were still able to utter a word used to beg him "dobeyey menya" (finish me off.) They knew that there was no chance of getting any help. All they wanted was for someone to take them out of their misery.

When he finally got out of the range of the machine guns, he began to ask for the command of his regiment, which was a couple kilometers farther. He found it. In a few minutes, a colonel the commanding officer of his regiment, a middle aged man with a noticeable stomach gave an order to fall in. It was applicable to those that managed to come back from the front. They took count, including my father, there were sixteen men. The sixteen men watched in astonishmen as their old commander broke down and cried.

Those few soldiers were attached to another company and a month or so later, under a similar artillery barrage, s shell tore off two fingers of my father's right hand. The index and the middle finger. It was still late 1914, and my father was taken all the way to a hospital in Moscow.

It was a time when the Russian people were patriotic and very much behind the Czar. His daughters used to visit the wounded soldiers in the hospitals and distribute medals. One of the Czar's daughters gave a medal to my father. He told me even her name but at that time I did not try to remember.

After being discharged from hospital my father came home, before the German army came in to us in 1915. As a former Russian soldier, my father had to report to the German authorities every so often.

My mother was a gifted storyteller. That is a family Auerbach trait, and her stories were spellbinding. I won't even attempt to imitate it. I will only try to tell a couple dry facts that remained in my memory of her youth.

My grandfather Laizer-Bear and grandmother Freida-Leah brought six children into this world. Five boys and one girl. Two of the boys died in infancy, the other three grew up to be well and healthy men. The oldest Shloime (Solomon), the second Pesach (Philip) and the third Lipah. Her brother, my uncle Lipah, was a volunteer fireman. Once during a fire my Uncle Lipah found himself in a burning house while the ceiling, on which

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some other volunteer have just pulled up a barrel full of water, collapsed on him. After coming to, he seemed to be in good health.

A couple years later, he left for the states, where he shortly afterwards, married Becky and brought into this world, their only child Irving. Unfortunately, my uncle Lipah died in the states a very young man. The circumstances of his death are unknown to me. But I remember my mother always blaming the incident during that fire for his untimely death.

My uncle Pesach (Philip) left Shershev sometime around the turn of the century to avoid the conscription into the Czarist army. My grandparents remained in Shershev with the two children, the oldest my uncle Shloime (Salomon), and the youngest, my mother - Esther-Beilah.

In the beginning of this 20th century my uncle Shloime married a local girl, Esther-Libah Winograd and started to raise a family of his own.

There was nothing more precious to my grandmother Freida-Leah than her only daughter, my mother, nor was anything too good for her. As my mother used to tell: The only tin bath tub in shtetl was in their house and nobody was allowed to use it except my mother. The same bath tub became ours after my grandparents passed away.

In such conditions was my mother raised, up until the first world war broke out. Even then life in Shershev went on almost as before. People knew that a war was going on but what the situation is or where the front is, nobody knew.

Here is a good example; My uncle Shloime (Solomon) had hired two young men to split wood in his wood shed for the winter. As they were working the first artillery shell fell on Shershev. The explosion scared the two young men so much that they threw away the axes and the pieces of wood and ran away. It just happened that in that shed stood a samovar. One piece of the wood they threw hit the samovar and made a dent in it.

This story was told to me by my mother in the mid thirties. Among many stories about the first world war. I did not pay much attention to it for there were more stories and much more interesting.

The years went by and I survived the second world war, refugee camps and came to Canada in 1948. Less than a year later, I visited my uncle Shloime and family when they lived yet on Daily Avenue. Sitting there in the kitchen, one of the daughters opened a kitchen cabinet to get something. I looked up and noticed two samovars stuck away on the highest shelf in the very corner. They looked like they had not been moved or touched in a long time. One had a quite noticeable dent in its side.

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This takes us back to 1915. It seems that the Germans did not need much to drive the Czarist army out of Shershev, for the next day the Germans arrived.

The retreating Czarist army broke into Jewish stores and homes helping themselves to anything portable.

The Jewish population could not decide what to do. Should they go east with the retreating Russian army or stay and be after all under the westernized and civilized Germans. They stayed.

The Germans did introduce new laws and practices. Like opening a window for fresh air in winter. For Jews the most embarrassing thing was the stopping bearded men and looking for lice. If found, they used to cut the beard off right in the middle of the street. Most men wore beards. To be seen in the street without a freshly cut beard was very embarrassing.

There were other laws. Like being sent away from home to work for little pay. Constant food shortages and outright hunger.

My grandfather, Laizer-Bear, being over fifty, was exempt from being sent away. Never the less, he had a wife and a daughter (my mother) to support, so he volunteeringly went to work in Bialowierza Forest, making shingles. Even with his pay, the two woman were hungry many a day.

Not all were as hard off. I recall as my mother used to tell us children how difficult it was for them during the German occupation in the first world war.

In 1920 my parents got married. Our part of the world was still in a tumult. The two main antagonists in central and eastern Europe, Russia, by then the Soviet Union, and Germany were in the middle of a revolution. Germany tired and exhausted after a humiliating defeat. The Soviet Union likewise, exhausted after a prolonged war and a bloody revolution, that left the country in ruins, was leading an army of mislead, deceived, fanatic idealist to what they thought was a bright future for humanity.

Their objective was to cross Poland and unite with their likes in Germany..

Already marching westwards through Shershev, Shershev Jews branded them with the name "Borvese: (bare footed). They wore a hodge-podge of uniforms footwear and light weapon of an assorted vintage and caliber. No visible rolling stock or provissions. Their transportation consisted of starving horses barely pulling the wagons.

How such a genius as Trotzky hoped to cross Europe with such an army is difficult to understand. No wonder that an army like the newly created Poland could muster, could beat back the undisciplined, unorganized

mass of humanity. An army that instead to march well provided and on a full stomach, marched in tatters and hungry on unknown roads in strange lands.

It was on such a day in late afternoon that my parents, just recently wed were going from my mother's parents to my fathers. They were going via back alleys, as the main street was full with retreating Soviet soldiers, who were running back aftre their defeat near Warsaw. If they appeared pitiful on their way to victory, one can imagine what they looked like on the way running in defeat. What was worse was that in that defeat, they not only lost the battle, they lost the spirit and idealism that could bring them on foot and empty stomachs from Moscow to Warsaw. An army that lived not on reserve and proper supply, but on bounty from peasants and towns people. An army that for a change did not supplement its shortages by plunder as it was usual practice. All those things, all their manners and behaviors were lost with it.

Suddenly, in that narrow alley my parents found themselves surrounded by riders who demanded everything they had in their pockets. After taking it all and ready to leave, one of them noticed the wedding ring on my mother's finger, promptly demanding it. As if in spite the ring would not come of. Without hesitation the rider or riders ordered my mother to put the finger on the nearby fence. Unsheathing his sword, he raised it to chop the finger off. My mother asked him to let her try it again. He did, and this time the ring came off. They rode off.

Those were the same people that a short time ago marched on western Europe, with lofty ideals of bringing to them a bright future. How fast their ideals evaporated.

In that year 1920, the western provinces of Belaruss (white Russia) and Ukraine remained under Polish rule, until 1939. We will speak about it later. Meantime let us return to 1937.

As I have mentioned previously, there was in Shershev a Jewish library. The main initiator of this idea came from my cousin Abe (Abraham) Auerbach, my uncle Shloimes (Salomon) son. It was started by school children, of whom my cousin Abe was one. Those teenagers desire and longing for Jewish and Hebrew literature was the spur, the stimulus that moved them to fulfill this dream and nobodys desire for knowledge was stronger than that of my cousin Abe.

But the generation of those founders grew up. A couple left Europe, like my cousin Abe, some moved to neighboring shtetls and the rest had to assume responsibility for family, or got married.

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One of those not young bachelors was a man by the name of Shimon Izbicky. By trade a tailor, considered intelligent and well read. Still, he found time to be active in charitable and benevolent organizations, particularly in the local orphanage. Yet he did not neglect the library.

In one of that Saturday afternoons, he met us boys walking in the street. Stopping us he asked us to meet him next Saturday at the same time in the Hebrew school, what we did. To our surprise we found there a group of boys 2-3 years older than us. Among them was Motl Notes, Yekutyel Wapenshtein, Nachum Malecky, Moish-Eli Shocherman and a couple more. Besides them, there was the entire managing committee of the library. I do remember a couple of them; Feigah Feinbir and Lipa Elman's older son and of course Shimon Izbicky.

Shimon Izbicky opened the meeting very professionally and immediately got to the main subject. He spoke eloquantly and movingly how difficult it was years ago for boys our age and younger to raise money to buy the first few books and how much effort it was put in the following years to bring up the number of books to the present 850. How much time they put in to keep the library open in the evenings so as to give the Shershev Jewish youth a chance to read Jewish and Hebrew books, not only written by Jewish writers, but translated from other languages into Yiddish. He mentioned how great it is the desre of our youth for education, but is limited to a seven grade school, as very few parents can afford to send them away, where they can obtain higher education. Yet, he continued, one can acquire a good deal of knowledge if one is willing, and one way is by reading books.

He stopped for a few seconds, then continued. I would like to give you an example of one local young man who had an overwhelming desire for knowledge. He set assidiously day and night over books and acquired so much respect, and was held in such high esteem, that if; here I am using the very words I heard from Shimon Izbicky over 60 years ago :If in a hot summer day he would sit down in the middle of the market square, took off his shoes and pulled off his sweaty socks, the finest girl in town would be glad to wash them for him." This young man is now in the land of Israel and his name is Chaim Shemesh.

I would say this was the example Shimon Izbicky could think of at that very moment and carried to excess. However, there is no question that Chaim Shemesh was the most respected young man in shtetl, and the most sought after by girls and parents with girls of marriageable age.

Here I have to confess that I felt a bit smug when Izbicky mentioned the name Chaim Shemesh for Chaim was my father's cousin.

Both their mothers were sisters. Unfortunately, Chaim's mother died in child birth and he was named after her, her name was Chayie-Zlate so Chaim had two first names Chaim-Zelik.

The appeal of Shimon Izbicky worked and we, boys, took over the management of the library. We spent a lot of time moving the library to a more central location. Not having funds, we carried the books and shelves by hand, and taking turns keeping it open every evening.

The summer vacations of summer 1937 ended and I went back to school. My sister Sheva left for Pruzany to continue in the gymnasium. Although she used to come home for every Sabbath, it took some preparation. I used to miss her singing and the new songs she used to bring with her that were so catchy. Even my two little sisters Sonia (Sarah) and Liba, both gifted with sweet voices used to join in. My mothers, who too had a good voice used to nod with approval listening to them sing.

None of us imagined that those were the rare, golden moments that would soon disappear forever.

My little brother, Liova (Leibl) entered grade three, and my sister Sonia (Sarah) enrolled in grade one

I did not look forward to the new school year knowing what the last one was like. To my surprise I was wrong. Right on the first morning of the school year a few Christian boys started picking on us two, a couple others told them to leave us alone. I noticed later that the boys were whispering to each other in a kind of discussion. Apparently, they came to some agreement to leave us alone.

The atmosphere in class had changed completely. For example, as the boys used to come to school in the morning, they used to form groups, usually by grade. Each joining the group used to shake hands with everyone, but they would not extend a hand to us two Jewish boys. Now all this had changed. They started shaking our hands, and without any remarks. All other persecutions had ceased.

All this happened in the school year 1937-38 when the anti-semitism in Poland was approaching its highest peak, which it did in 1938.

It is way over half a century since then, and I still cannot understand what came upon the Christian boys in my class, for they were an exception.

The unwillingness to attend school disappeared. Not only this, it seemed that the entire class was paying more attention to the teachers than before.

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It was the seventh grade, the last year, and maybe the class understood the importance of learning and took advantage of it.

The growth of anti-semitism caused the growth of Polish nationalism, which in turn provoked the many minorities living in Poland, including the Belaruss people, among whom we lived. They, the Belaruss considered themselves Russians, or at least closely related and sympathized with the Soviet Union. Poland was at logger head with the Soviet Union and vise-versa, the local people did not believe the rumors circulating about the Soviet Union, ascribing it to Polish propoganda. Is it possible that this was a kind of protest by the Russian Orthodox students against the Catholic Poles by not following their anti-semetic propaganda? Their sudden turn around was not from the love for Jews I would rather say from hatred of the Poles.

The winter did not bring a let up to Jewish persecution. Jews spoke about politics when ever and wherever they met, in the street, at home and in the synagogue. Our next door neighbor Nacham Feldman, Nacham the stitcher, as he was known, used to come in to us often in the evening for a chat. He was a smart man and witty. Being some twenty years older than my parents, they used to speak to him with respect. However, as our houses were divided by a narrow lane that we both used, we used to see each other a dozen times a day, which led to them becoming good friends. His wife, Tzina was a tall and not skinny woman friendly and good natured. To my parents, she had a motherly approach. My mother loved her. My mother resented the fact that she Tzina, used to go to the well for water, particularly in the winter, and why she did not send her husband

Once sitting and chatting in our house, my mother asked him; Reb (Mr.) Nachman, how come you always let your wife go to the well for water? He, without blinking an eye, responded; Estherke, Estherke (my mother's name), I was and will remain a good son that listens to his mother, when I was a little boy, my mother used to say to me: Nachman, Nachman, don't go to the well for you might fall in. So even now, that I am an old man and my mother is long gone, I still follow her warnings and instructions. Understandably, we all burst out laughing, but it is to admire how this older and smart man wiggled out of an embarrassing situation so smoothly and amusingly.

That winter of 1937-38 was the last unmarred winter our family had together. To be truthful it past in dread and apprehension, not knowing what to expect and what decrees the government will come out with next in spring. Meanwhile the winter slowed down the disposition of the "Endex". (Polish Nationalist Party).

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We spent unmolested at home the entire winter. Sitting together, doing home work, reading a book and keeping an eye on my eight year old brother Liova (Leibl) and the younger by two years Sonia (Sarah) who was in grade one. Feeling smug with being able to help them. I also had a hobby collecting stamps, which was very fashionable among youngsters in those days.

Everybody in the house was doing something but the busiest person in the house was my mother. I cannot remember a moment when she was sitting idle. After the cooking and baking, washing and cleaning, she used to sit evenings doing something. There was always sewing and darning, especially darning. Mens socks always needed darning. In those days the artificial materials like nylon and acrylic were unknown. What was available was cotton and wool. It happened often that a new pair of man's socks had a hole in the sole the very same day. My mother used to make sure that we were always dressed clean and proper. If there is such a thing with a mother as a favorite child, it was I and I suspect I felt it and took advantage of it, to the detriment of my other siblings.

There were two tiled stoves and a baking oven that were heated twice a day in the cold winter days. Once a day in spring and fall. The best time and day for me was Friday morning. My mother used to get up on that morning at two o'clock and get busy in the kitchen to bake "Challah" (a twisted white bread eaten on Sabbath). I used to share the room with my little brother Liova (Leibl), my bed stood against the back wall of the bake oven. As soon as my mother used to light the fire in the oven the wall used to get warm and so the bed and room. The unusual warmth of the bed and sounds in the kitchen used to wake me up. It is difficult to describe the comfort, the feeling of well being that I used to experience then, knowing that the person, the dearest to me in the world, my mother, who would do anything for me, even give her life, is up and watching over me. That she is up and is now baking Challah and cake for us, that when I will get up she will have a hot potatoe pancake, which I love, ready for me, that meantime I can lie in a very warm bed while outside is bitterly cold.

It was about that time that I noticed that my mother doesn't have to coax me to eat anymore which was a daily procedure ever since I could remember.

This problem my mother did not have with my older sister Sheva. She always was an obedient and compliant child, good hearted and willing to help our mother with the younger one.

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One of the functions my father did was the swaddling of the infants when he was home after closing the store.

I will take a few lines to explain what it meant. Due to shortages of certain vitamins in those and prior to those days, infants had a tendency to develop themselves bow-legged. To prevent it, parents used to start swaddling the infants from the age of two weeks to the age of 4-5 months. It was a cotton strip some 10-12 centimeters wide and several meters long. After changing the diaper, the infant was wrapped with this long strip of cotton starting from the sole of the feet going around and around with particular attention to the legs, slowly going up the body up to under the arms.

This method prevented the legs of the infant from becoming bow legged. This swaddling used to take some time, making the changing of diapers quite a job.

So let us return back from infancy to winter of 1937-38. Our teacher of Polish in grade seven was the school principal, the very same that a year earlier advised us Jews to hang ourselves, as long as Poland gets rid of its Jews. On one of his lessons some Christian students struck up a conversation about Jews using Christian blood for matzo.

I always suspected that they knew that it was a false accusation, for every Pessach when we used to bring matzo to school for our lunch, they used to ask, literally beg for it. On my reprimanding them that it contains Christian blood they used to laugh it off and ask for more.

Still during that lesson they all had serious faces, and one would think that they meant it.

To my surprise, that anti-semitic teacher declared in a clear and loud voice, that it is not true that Jews used Christian blood in matzo nor any other blood, nor anything else except flour and water.

In the second house on "Bet-Chayim" Street or Nova as it was called in Polish, there lived a tailor with the appropriate name of Shneider. His first name was Zalman whose brother Berl, a tailor too, had a son by the name of Hershl, who was a friend of mine, before we drifted a bit apart. To him, I will return later.

That Zalman Shneider's oldest son was called Reuben. A young man in his late twenties. As Shershev had recently lost its status as "Mjasto"(town) reducing it to "Mjasteczko" (little town or borough), they closed the city hall replacing it by a "Gemina"(municipality). The government appointed a "Soltys"(village mayor or bailiff) for Jewish affairs that young man Reuben, in whom they had confidence for some reason.

Around "Purim" (the holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from the persecution of the Persian Haman), the tailors and shoe makers used to get especially busy. Jews used to start ordering new clothing and footwear for Pessach, of course, those that could afford it. Christians were getting ready with the same for Easter.

Most of their clientele were from out of town. Farmers that needed something made, be it in clothing or footwear. As a rule they used to drive in from their village by horse and buggy, come in to the tailor, dress maker or shoe maker with the material. The craftsman used to take the measurements and start working on it while the farmer sat there and waited. Other farmers used to go about town or try to sell his produce if he brought any.

In late afternoon or early evening, his pants or jacket was ready and he used to take it home.

So happened, that a farmer sitting in Zalmen Shneider's house waiting for his order to be finished jumps up, runs out in the street with a scream that he, Zalman Shneider, wanted to slaughter him and use his blood for matzo.

As far as time, it could not be better. It was Purim time, when Jews start baking matzo and it also was early spring1938. A year when pogroms in Poland became a common occurrence. A time when every city, town and village waited for a spark, any spark, to start beating up Jews, breaking windows, robbing stores and homes and let us not forget, murder.

The farmer however, miscalculated as far as the place is concerned. His running and screaming all the way to the police station led through the Jewish inhabited market square and main street. His running into the police station did not provoke any reaction. After all they knew that the whole accusation is a farce. Besides, it happened in the house of the "Soltys" (village mayor and bailiff) whom they themselves appointed and had confidence in to the detriment of the Jews.

The Christian population without the approval of the police would not dare do anything. So for the time being, Shershev got off lucky. Would have the famer chosen a different tailor this false accusation would have had a different ending.

This is how the winter 1937-38 ended. As soon as the snow melted and the road dried out, there started to appear all kinds of government commissions, health commission, sanitary commission, beautifying commission, planning commission and a host of other commissions and inspectors, whose only and visible task it was to find any excuse to penalize the Jewish store keepers and petty dealers. Literally to strangle them.

How obvious their intention were. I will give an example of an event in the nearby town of Pruzany: Among a dozen or so barbers there was one by the name of Berestycky. Not only did he have a pure Polish name but so was his appearance. Four inspectors of the sanitary commission came in, two from higher up from Brest and two locals.

After looking around one of the out of town inspectors said with approval; no wonder it is so clean here, it is owned by a Pole. One of the local inspectors said, he is a Jew. The four inspectors hung around another couple of minutes and found an imperfection. Of course, the barber was immediately fined.

It came to a situation that Jews were being beaten up walking in a non-Jewish inhabitated street.

Right from spring an atmosphere of hate and pogrom was being felt across the land. When Poles marched in a protest march in the city of Wilno for the killing of two Polish border guards by Lithuanian soldiers, on April 29\38, they attacked Wilno Jews in the street, killing one, injuring many, vandalising Jewish property and possession.

The Poles behaved just like the Russians under Czars, whose slogan was "Bay Zydov, Spassay Rossieuh" (Kill the Jews and save Russia), or even during the Russian Revolution, when a Bolshevik leader proclaimed that "Jewish blood serves as grease for the wheels of the revolution." Not to mention the Polish neighbor to the wests, even in 1938.

A month later there was a pogrom in Brest-Litowsk. A city of 45000 inhabitants, 75% Jews. The several hundred participants in that pogrom would be no match for the Jews of Brest-Litowsk. However, as soon as some Jews started to gather for a fight, there appeared police to arrest them. Letting the mob of robbers to go on.

Jewish property and even lives became licentious (wanton). The first couple pogroms were followed in June by several others, like in Minsk-Mazowecky, Tarnopol June 11\38 Przemysl June 13\38 and others.

A line or two about the pogroms in Brisk. I heard an eye witness account from my close friend Laizer Rotenberg, who was studying there and was present during that pogrom.

The pogromists concentrated their destructive effort mainly on the Jewish streets with Jewish businesses. Breaking into the stores and warehouses they helped themselves to whatever they wanted., throwing out the rest into the street and destroying it.

Going through the Jewish streets several days later, one could still see not only the broken doors and windows of Jewish homes and stores, but

even the destroyed Jewish possessions like the broken furniture, thrown pillows and featherbeds, feathers flying all over. But in the destructiveness of the mob, who dragged out of the stores flour and all kinds of cereal, sugar and grains poured from the bags into a heap, drenched with oil and kerosine.

With the successful German annexation of the Saar-Gebit (Saar-region) and later with the Onschlus (union) with Austria, the appetite of the Polish government for more territory grew. Pamphlets appeared portraying beautiful palm covered sany beaches and blue shores, underneath with big letters; We want colonys!!!

They soon realized that the powers possessing colonies would not give it to them willingly. They decided to bully weaker neighbors like Lithuenia. It seems that her allied told them not to rock the boat and it quietened down.

And so in June 1938 my school year ended. To my surprise I got better marks than expected. To my and everybody's regret the time and mood was not condusive for celebrations. Hitler had just driven out his so called Polish Jews. Those were Jews who settled in Germany before and during the first world war, became German citizens and lived there for decades. The Germans picked them up in their homes, were ordered to leave behind homes and possessions, and drove them to the Polish border. The Poles in return refused to accept them claiming that they left their territories before a Poland was recreated, that they are German citizens, thus they had no right to Polish citizenship.

The poor homeless Jews were now stuck on the German Polish border. They remained stranded on that border near the town called Zbonshyn, without means of support and without a roof over their heads. The Germans refused even permission to deliver to them food from the German side.

A campaign started among the Jewish communities in Poland to provide them at least with food. I still remember the campaign in Shershev when the entire community gathered in the large synogogue. Rich and poor, each present contributed according to his means, which was loudly announced at that moment.

After my father contributed which, too, was announced loud and clear, I heard a member of the community saying to the one next to him; Itzik (Isaak), (that is my father), fears that should the Germans come here they will take away his beautiful newly built home, that is why he contributed so generously.

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I resented that remark, that came from jealousy instead of gratitute. Would I have been older I would have told that man a thing or two. But I was not.

The several thousand Jews remained on that border in no mans land. A few barracks were erected to protect them from rain and the winter 1938-9. Their trace and vestige disappeared with the German attack on Poland on September 1st 1939.

This short chapter in the long Jewish martyrdom is known as the "Zbonshyn camp story."

The unsuccessful attempt by Poland to provoke Lithuanis to war did not quench her appetite for more territory. The summer 1938 brought to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. To be more precise, the betrayal of. Like over a fallen pray, so did Poland throw itself over the being devoured by Germany Czechoslovakia, demanding her crumbs. The crumbs consisted of a piece of territory south of the Polish Czech border, south of a little river Olza.

The dying Czechoslovakia sold out by European democracies, was not in the mood to spill blood on a lost cause, as she was being torn apart by Nazi Germany, surrendered the piece of territory to Poland.

Without hindsight even, it is difficult to understand the senseless, shortsighted, truly idiotic policy of the Polish government of the years 1937-8. As they say, even a blind person or an absolute idiot could have seen where Hitler's politics and plans are leading. Yet Poland refused to see the writing on the wall. Instead tried hard to mimic Germany.

I don't know how impressed the Poles were with the grab of that small piece of territory from Czechoslovakia. I only know that in our part of Poland the population, Jewis or non-Jewish looked at it disdainfully, Even the continuous anti-Jewish laws did not succeed in pacifying the disgust they felt towards the government for that act.

That same summer my uncle Eli (Eliyouh) came home after his two year army service. Soon after, my uncle Hershl with his wife, Shaina, left Shershev for Kamieniec-Litowsk. The home town of Shaina where he became a partner in his father in law's business.

My uncle Eli's return home from military service were not only happy days for him but for me, too. As he was only nine years older than I, I used to consider him an older brother and to look up to. I guess he found in me a good listener, for he could not share his experience with his peers, who too, like him, served in the army at that same time. How glad I was to walk

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with him, as he was telling me about life in the army. Even teaching me some of the songs they sang in there.

Again, my sister Sheva spent that summer vacation at home, and as before, this time, she brought with her a new repertoire of the latest songs. Some out of town girls, her classmates, came to visit her during vacation time. One was Julie Rogotner, a second was Reshl Shlosberg, a third, whose name and name of her shtetl I have forgottten. I am mentioning it because of her beautiful Yiddish she spoke. I can still hear my mother wondering and saying; " Where does such a young girl from a small town come to have such an eloquent Yiddish?'

One of my sister's close friends was Etche Liwerant, the Rabbi Noah's youngest daughter, who finished the Polish school at the same time as my sister, and was going now to the Hebrew gymansium in Pruzany.

I don't remember how and when young men began to appear in our house. They were three or four years older than I. Like myself and my friends they too used to come in a group, never alone and never remained alone with a girl, be it my sister or her friends.

The only thing I had in common with those older boys, was the game of chess. They were better at it than I, but from time to time I used to beat one of them.

I never analized the reason why they came to play chess with me. Was it because they wanted to play chess, or to hang around my sister. I believe the second is the right answer. After all, my sister Sheva was a good looking girl, for that time being educated by attending the gymnasiium and was Itzik (Isaak) Kantorowczes daughter.

My close friend Laizer Rotenberg too, came home from Brest-Litowsk for vacation. With his arrival, our group came back to life. He had the qualifications of a good friends; trustworthy, solidary, dependable, not an exaggerator, nor a braggart. His courage and physical strength also came in handy.

The news from the land of Israel was not encouraging. The Arab terror did not let up and there were new Jewish victims every day. My father used to take comfort in the fact that some Jews used to hit back, despite the policy of the Zionist leftist leadership that preached and obeyed by the policy of none retalliation. My mother used to mourn the new victims.

Once I mentioned to my mother that I would like to go to the land of Israel, she would not hear of it. On a second occasion I asked both my parents why we are sitting here in Poland, why don't we go somewhere else?

I received a Jewish answer, that is, with a question, and what will we live on somewhere else? Here at least, we are making a living.

In growing tension and persecution the summer vacation ended. There ere no facilities for farther schooling in Shershev. The other alternative was the Hebrew gymnasium in Pruzany. The chances for a Jew of being accepted in the Polish gymnasium were minimal. There, being no choice, I enrolled in the Hebrew one. Just a couple weeks later, my parents realized that it serves no purpose. I will waste 4-6 years and get a matriculation that is worthless in Poland, as the government deprived many other Hebrew high schools of its status of gymnasium.

In previous years, children of merchants, would not go to be tradesmen or artisans. It was considered beneath their dignity. But as of late, with the opening of trade schools, where one could learn a trade and at the same time advance ones education, the trades schools became fashionable. My parents decided to take me out of the gymnasium and enroll me in the trade school in Brest-Litowsk.

The school had its own dormitory for out of town students, to which I was accepted. It was on Trzeciego-Maja Street No.66. A large four story brick building. On the first floor was the kitchen, dining room, shower room and locker room, with over one hundred lockers, one for each student. The second and third floors were all bed rooms with some 15 boys to a room and on the fourth floor were two large rooms, a home work room and a reading room.

The students came from as far east as Baranowicz, Slonim, Wolkowisk and Nowogrodek, and as far south as Kowel and Kamien-Koszyrsk. There were some from the north like a shtetl Molczadz and closer places like Cobrin, Pruzany, Zabinka and others. There was in fact a small group of boys from an orphanage in Warsaw that grew up in a non Jewish environment, for they knew very little of Jewish tradition or customs. They spoke no Yiddish and conversed only in Polish, what was for the rest of us, east Polish Jews, strange.

My school year in Brest-Litowsk started late. The couple weeks in gymnasium and formalities of entry to school in Brest-Litowsk made it so. As a result, I spent an extra few days in Shershev. A good part of that time I walked with my friends on the wind blown streets in a depressing mood. What added to that disposition was the unusual amount of ravens, that flew from one naked tree to the other, with their continuous crowing like forbidding messengers of terrible events to come.

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Thus I arrived in Brest-Litowsk in late fall. The first thing that struck my eye was not my new way of life, but the screaming hugh headlines in all the newspapers. They proclaimed the news that Poland is now hosting the distinguished guests from Germany, like Guering, Ribbertropf, Himler and other bigshots. That those guests are now in Bialowieza taking part in a hunt.

The next day on the front pages the same newspapers had displayed large photos of the successful hunt including the rows of the killed animals and exact number. Among them were over a hundred wild boars, a couple dozen deer and moose and an assortment of other animals.

I, one of the millions of Jews in Poland, ask ourselves the question; How naïve, deceived and outright blind can the Poles be?

With the onset of winter something had changed in the air.

It started with a hint in the German press about the free city of Danzig, which quickly developed into the question of all of Pomern, Poland acces to the Baltic.

The Poles began to sense that it might have been a mistake to follow Hitler in all his deeds although there was no breast beating for Jewish persecution. The very mention of Danzig in the German press, was enough to distract their attention from the Jews and better analize Hitler's intentions about the city.

Finally it dawned on them that Poland is not a power to be reconed with, especially Hitler. They started to arm in their primitive way, as everyone knows, to acquire weapons and build an army, money was needed. In order to raise the money, they proclaimed a general loan. It was not done like in other countries by selling bonds, instead they called it a "compulsory loan", knowing that the population had litle trust in promises of repayment.

Each household and bread winner was assessed. A sum of money which had to be paid within a short time.

Here again, the Jewish population bore the heaviest burden. The ten prcent Jewish population of Poland was assessed and contributed fifty percent of the total sum. Jews groaned and moaned having to pay such tributes, which in many cases deprived them of their daily bread. Turning comfortable business men into petty merchants and petty merchants into beggers.

In March 1939, the Polish government carried out the first mobilization. It consisted of last years released men, who have completed their two year compulsory army service. Among them was my uncle Eli

(Eliyaho), my father's youngest brother, and all his friends that served at the same time.

They were to appear at once to the rail way station Linovo-Oranczyce, 30 kilometers away, where farther instructions would be given.

As my uncle later related after that particular part of the war ended; he arrived on that rail way station where everything was in chaos and panic, because of lack of organization and preparation by the army. It took over twenty four hours to get him and others on the train in the direction of Warsaw. Before reaching Warsaw the train turned north towards east Prussia.

They disembarked at the Prussian border, near a shtetl Mlawa. My uncle was assigned to an artillery battery consisting of four cannons. They were ordered to dig in and make covered trenches that served as living quarters.

In Shershev and I am sure in all other towns and cities of Poland, this mobilization evoked fear and apprehension, despite the attempt by the government to dispel the rumors of an imminent war.

The spring of 1939 brought open German demands of Poland to return Danzig to Germany, to what Poland replied with continuous but smaller mobilizations. Poland started a feverish rearmament program. Its army was horse drawn, except for the few hundred outdated tanks the entire army depended for mobility on horses. The army began to buy horses and the only source were the farmers.

Money was no obstacle, they simply began to print more. All one could see was new bank notes. They paid for horses exorbitant prices, double and triple the value.

Suddenly, the farmers had a lot of money to spend, and spend they did. They spend on clothing, foot wear, bicycles. Some even removed their thatch roofs and replaced it with shingles even thin.

Money began to appear in circulation as if a prelude to a bad omen. Still, for the time being, Jewish petty store keepers and merchants began to make a livelihood, for the first time in a long while.

Hitler's Germany was now demanding not only Danzig but all of Pomern, that strip of land connecting Poland to the sea, but at the same time cutting east Prussia in half, thus with all of Germany.

To the threatening voices of Hitler, Poland continued to answer with more small mobilizations which were easier to handle, avoiding chaos at the rail way stations and minimizing the panic of the first mobilization of March.

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The question if it will come to a war ceased to exist and was replaced by the question of when. The newspaper analysts predicted that it will take place in fall, right after the harvest. They substantiated their opinion by reasoning that the assaulter as well as the assailed would want to take in the crop from the fields, assuring a food supply for the army and population.

Many Jews at that time already wished they had a chance to get out of Poland, although in their most horrible night mares they could not have foreseen the cruelty and savagery that the future holds for them.

Unfortunately, the doors of every country in the world were closed for them. The few Jews that did write to the foreign embassy in Warsaw for visas received outright refusals or at best, were informed that there is a long list of earlier applicants that are being considered, therefore the present petition can not be accepted.

A continuous flow of news used to come via newspapers and radios. Some of the news carried an ironic character. The Polish papers and radio started complaining that the German youth and young men are beating up Poles in the streets of Danzig, breaking their windows and boycotting Polish stores. In general making life difficult for them. Exactly the very same words that we Jews used to accuse the Poles off.

Now the Poles of Danzig were being exposed to the experience of a persecuted people, instead of persecutors.

In those long summer days, we used to sit up at home till late after midnight and talking politics, or just to talk.

It seems that I had a premonition that this, almost quiet and normal life style, was not to last much longer, for they became dear and precious to me. I listened intensively to my mother's beloved voice, her instructions, fables and parables, some of them she acquired from her own experience, during the course of her own young life and still others which had their roots in the "Talmud'.

Here is an example that I heard from my mother referring to a person who was educated but did not receive the appropriate respect befitting his stature due to the fact that he was lacking common sense.

This is the story: many years ago, there was once a king in the times when people believed in astrology. The king had one child, a son, who unfortunately was not very bright. When the king got older, he began to worry about the future of his kingdon, knowing that he can not entrust the future of his country in the hands of his son, the crown prince. The older the king got , the more pressing the problem became. Unable to solve it by himself, the king turned to his most trusted advisors for help.

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After a long deliberation one of the king's advisors proposed to send the crown prince to an astrology school, supporting his proposition that when the crown prince will become king and should he be confronted with a decision, he will look up to the sky and by the stars will be able to tell what to do.

The suggestion pleased the king and his advisors. The crown prince was immediately sent away to the most prestigious astrology school in the country.

A few years later, the crown prince came back with a beautiful ribbon and stamp decorated diploma, stating that he graduated the astrology school with honours. His father, the king, in a moment of jubilation decided to throw a big party to which all his advisors, ministers, generals and even members of the foreign diplomatic corp were invited.

When the party was in full swing, one of the guests called out loudly; let us see what his honor, the crown prince, has learned there. All the guests applauded the idea. One of the guests took some object in his fist, walking over to the crown prince, he asked him: tell me your excellency, what do I have in my fist? The prince walked out to the garden and looked up to the stars. He looked at the sky long, thoroughly, and carefully. He saw the man was holding a round object with a hole in the midde, Without hesitation, the crown prince called out; a millstone. The man opened his fist and there it was, a ring.

True, my mother said, the young man studied well, and saw in the stars a round thing with a hole in the middle, but to understand that you can not hold a millstone in your fist was above his intelligence. The moral of the story is valid today and remains for generations to come.

One of her advises, which she repeated to me several time was; when you deal with someone let yours defer. This is, let the other one know that he is getting the better part of the deal or bargain.

I lived up to this principle or doctrine if you like, all my life. If this practice helped me materially, I doubt. In fact, I know that it did not, but to my peace of mind and clearness of conscious, it did wonders. Laying down to sleep, I knew that I did not wrong anybody nor did I violate any moral standard and slept with a clear conscious. My mother's instructions and traditional Jewish upbringing served me as a trustworthy guide in my most difficult times.

Something strange or bizarre happened that very summer, to what my mother was inadvertently involved.

There lived in Shershev a widow by the family name Kleingerg. She had two sons, the older my age Itzel, who attended Hebrew school with me in the same grade and whom I left in there when I went to the Polish school, The second son a couple years younger, by the name of Molie, did not attend school or Heder. He could be found anywhere and everywhere day or night, literally growing up wild. I am sure that his older brother Itzel attended school for free, for his mother could not afford to pay tuition. The poverty in the place where they lived was beyond description.

I am sure that Nathan Krenitzer's wife, who used to go around every Friday noon to the better to do homes, collecting Challah for the poor so that they should have a Challah for Sabbath, used to bring them some, too.

Once I asked my mother for whom Nathan's wife is collecting the Challah. My mother said that she does not know and does not want to know. All she knows is that it is being distributed among the poor that can not afford to bake their own.

Those two boys used to be dressed in rags. Hand me downs, from the better to do families in town.

That summer morning, as I walked out into our yard, I noticed the younger of the two, Molie walking around the rim of the old synagogue ceiling a height of some twenty meters, that was by then over grown with young birch trees.

I could not understand how this thirteen year old boy could have gotten there, while we have been trying to do it for years and so have others and older, without success.

Here was my chance to find out. I quickly ran across the garden towards the shull, not letting him out of my sight, as he was walking back and forth along the precipice or the ceiling. I stood silently in a corner waiting to see how he will get down. For a while he disappeared behind some protruding masonry, appearing on top of the wall of the hallway opposite me. Between him on top of the wall and the ground covered with pieces of bricks was a distance of twenty meters. Half way down was suspended a partly burned beam close to the wall. Without hesitation the boy turned around, lowering himself on his hand, he let himself go, hoping to land on the beam. He apparently miscalculated and missed his footing. Instead landing on the beam he hooked on with his chin and continued his fall towards the grounds. While falling his coat opened up like a pair of wings, apparently breaking his fall to a degree.

But the very fact that he wore a heavy coat on a summer day is proof of his sanity or insanity.

He landed on the ground flat on his back. I looked at him in horror as he was trying to stretch his arms and legs while a painful groan came out from inside him.

In fear and confusion, I ran home to tell my mother what happened. I found her in the usual place, the kitchen. Not wanting to alarm her unncessarily, I asked her in as quiet voice as I could master, " Guess, mom, who just fell of the shul wall ?" Without thinking a moment, my mother answered, Molie. I was stunned. How could anybody have told her. I was the only one inside the shul that saw him fall and if even not, I was running straight home and nobody could have beaten me to it, and why would have somebody run to tell my mother? Stunned, I blurt out, how did you know? In her quiet voice , my mother answered: I dreamed about it last night. Now my child, go out into the square and get some people to carry him to the doctor.

The square that time of day was alive with people and there was no shortage of volunteers. As we carried him through the square, the group of followers kept on growing. We carried him into the admitting office with the mob behind us. The doctor told us to put him down and ordered us all out.

I doubt if the doctor ever got paid for this visit. Molie's mother certainly could not pay for it. It seems that his Molie had more than one life. How he survived that fall I do not know. It is enough to say that a few days later, I saw him climbing the walls of the shul again.

However, the prophecy of my mother's dream, I have never forgotten.

That summer of 1939 came to Shershev a guest from the land of Israel, named Sonia Shemesh (Pinsky). The same Sonia that I mentioned several times before, the aunt of my two good friends, the brother Rotenberg.

Shortly after arriving in the land of Israel, she married my father's cousin, Chaim Shemesh. She came with a year and a half old, little daughter by the name of Lauma. The child was just beginning to talk and the few dozen word she knew, were in Hebrew. In Shershev, it was quite a sensation, imagine, a year old child and it already speaks Hebrew.

Her, Sonia's arrival, brought a commotion in shtetl, even excitement for me. Despite our discrepancy in age and family relationship, I felt very close to her, having spent countless hours in the house of her sister whose two sons, were my close friends, not to mention the fact that their two houses were under the same roof and were seeing each other often.

There was a continuous rivalry between me and my friends, the Rotenberg brothers, for holding the Israeli born baby who continued her babbling in Hebrew.

From Sonia the Jews of Shershev received personal regards from the over a dozen local youths who lived already in the land of Israel. Also precise description and portrayal of the situation there. Especially then, in the third year of the relentless Arab terror that raged there.

In the beginning of July of that summer of 1939, my uncle Eli, who was mobilized in March, came home on a ten day leave. In that tension filled summer, when former service men were continuously being mobilized there were no leaves given only in exceptional cases. My uncle earned it by aiming the canons of his battery on a moving object which was supposed to be a tank. And scoring a direct hit, by it taking first place in the competitions.

In graditute, his regiment commander gave him the ten days leave.

My uncle arrived under a blanket of secrecy. Not that his arrival was a secret but where from. Nothing of where he is or what he does was to be mentioned. The local population, Jewish or non-Jewish came to inquire about their sons, brothers and men folk, to which he was forbidden to answer. To us, immediate family, he confidentially said that he and some others from shtetl and vicinity are with him among many others near a shtetl Mlawa, close to the east Prussian border. That since the mobilization they continuously are improving their trenches in which they are spending most of their time. Being under strict orders not to tell anything, he did not seek company and spent most of his time with his parents, my grandparents and us, who used to come to spend with him as much time as possible.

Needless to say that the few days went by in a blink of an eye. We all accompanied him to the bus, the women with tears in their eyes.

To add to the sadness of his departure, the political situation became even more tense. While the non-Jewish population busied itself with taking in the harvest, the Jewish tradesmen, artisans and petty storekeepers lost the desire to provide, in a sence became apathetic, losing interest in everything and becoming consumed by the vents of the day. Unable to sit at their work, they used to congregate in small groups in the market square and talk politics. There was no shortage of themes or subjects. The newspapers and radios were full of news and the news was not good.

Through the entire month of August there were continuous call ups of men to the army. They were leaving in small groups and organized.

The discussions revolved around the problem of war and what to do when the front line will get closer. Nobody had any illusions about the might of the German army, especially in comparison to the Polish one and expected a Polish defeat, if her allies England and France won't come to her help. Still

we expected that Poland will hold out alone against Germany for some six months.

In our store where the self appointed smart politicians of the shtetl used to gather daily and discuss the latest news, were spending more and more time there. One turned to my father and asked; What will we do when the front line will get close and the entry of the German army will become imminent? My father answered : Then we will run to the Russians. (Soviets). But the Russians aren't letting anybody in even now, said the other, "so we will go against the Soviet bayonets," answered my father.

A thought ran through my mind in which I saw a row of Russian soldiers along the thousand kilometer long Polish border, standing shoulder to shoulder with one knee on the ground, each with a rifle in hand, the butt of the rifle resting on the ground pointing in the direction of the Polish border, a shining sharp bayone attached to the gun barrel and thousands of Jews running towards them impaling themselves on those bayonets.

For the first time in my life, particularly in that year of 1939 since the possibility of war became imminent, the very prospect of it sobered me up. But this thought did not stay with me long; Russians are not animals and communism is not Hitlerism. After all, they, the Communist, represent the bet of humanity unlike Nazism the worst. They will let us in and protect us from the Nazis.

The end of August was nearing. The media kept on reporting that the German army is massing on the Polish border and that the Germans are accusing the Poles of all kinds of provocations.

The Polish radio kept on assuring the public that her allies will come to her help, should Germany attack and between the three of them Germany will be defeated in no time.

The truth is that the population of eastern Poland that consisted mostly of Belarussians (White Russians), Ukrainians and Jews did not have much confidence in the Polish army, but in the two great powers, her allies, England and France they had too much.

Thursday, August 31\39 about four in the afternoon, the local government plastered large announcements on many walls that were proclaiming a total mobilization. Groups of people began to form around each proclaimation, reading the large print carefully over and over, as if by rereading they would get some more information out of it. Those proclamations were over a meter in size and had a heavy red slanted line across it. An exact replica that every man serving in the army used to get on his day of being discharged from the army. It even had the same wording

which said that if such a card appears in public places, the bearer should proceed to the nearest train station and await further instructions.

The forming groups of people seemed apathetic, they just stood there, looking at the announcements in silence or whispering one to another. Nobody seemed to want to go home. They just stood there as if waiting for something or somebody. My friend, Laizer Rotenberg ran home coming back in a minute with a camera in his hand to take a picture as he said, for posterity, of this important moment.

Eventually, we all dispersed home. I, admittedly, with a fair measure of apprehension but also with excitement.

The next morning Friday, September 1, 1939 the sun shone bright in the sky. Every one went about his or her business and did whatever one had to, but the lack of enthusiasm was visible all around. The men that were called up to the army were on the way to the railway station. I am sure that their families did not sleep that night and now their women folks were sitting home in tears.

My father went to open the store at eight as usual. My mother was busying herself in the kitchen and my older sister Sheva was helping her. It was to early to start visiting my friends, so I walked out into the yard.

A few minutes later, I see our neighbour's son Leibl Feldman pull up to his parents house on a bicycle, which was surprising. This Lebil, our neighbor Nachman Feldman's son, was a bachelor in his mid thirties. A broad shouldered robust man who at his age had a fair amount of life experience. He lived in Bialowieza where he and a partner had a trucking business. There were rumors that he is a well to do man.

He used to come home, to Shershev, to visit his parents every couple of weeks, but it was not his way to come on a bicycle. He used to come with one of his vehicles. I went into the house and told my mother, who too was a bit puzzled.

We did not have to wait long for the reason. Within minutes, our neighbor, his father came in and in a quiet voice asked if there are any none family members in the house, When we assured him that none, he said that his son Leibl just came from Bialowiza that was bombarded early this morning. When he, Leibl wanted to take one of his vehicles to go to Shershev, the police would not allow him, having orders to confiscate all private vehicles for the army, so he came on a bicycle.

The situation was tense and so was the population particularly from the previous days general mobilization. People began to gather around the few radios in town with loud speakers. There were three in Jewish homes;

one the druggist, the doctor and one at my uncle Reuben's, which were put in front of the open windows for all to hear.

At ten on that memorable morning the president Mosczycky addressed the nation. It was a patriotic speech in which he officially announced that Poland was attacked by Germany. That battles are taking place all along the Polish German border. I still remember a sentence or two he used : "We will fight for every Polish threshold and for every road side cross."

As expected finishing the speech with a promise of victory, " For G-d and justice is on our side."

One of the first functions of the police was to order my father to lock our store so that alcohol should not be available. The same applied to the other four restaurants in town, who submitted to the order without protest. They remembered only too well the first world war, when alcoholic drinks were the best commodity to have.

The townspeople remembered other things from that war, like fires that burned houses and all possessions and the plundering of undisciplined and unscrupulous soldiers.

To protect oneself from such things people came up with all kinds of ideas. In our case, we had two large trunks with forged metal straps all around. They must have belonged to my mother's parents, my grandparents Auerbach, who could have used them in the first world war.

I and my sister Sheva, helped my parents to fill them up with better clothing, tablecloths, linen, some underwear, silverware and other considered valuable or precious items. We even used a couple of large wooden cases in which we used to ship vodka to pack other stuff in. My friend, Meir Kalbkauf's father had a horse and wagon. He came to take it to his large orchard where we burried it all and concealed it so well that a stranger would not be able to tell that the ground had been touched. Thus we had protected some of our household items from fires and plunder. Of course we were not the only ones. Every family did the same thing to a larger or lesser degree.

A good many pages earlier I mentioned that my father bought in partnership with our neighbour Nachman Feldman, a garden from Pelett Aprik, before he left for the land of Israel with his daughter Mali. The garden was directly behind the stall of Nachman Feldman, who used it as a wood shed. A stranger would take it for granted that the garden belonged to Nachman.

The last couple of years, since my father and Nachman bought the garden, they pretended to play in gardening. Successful it was not. Simply,

they did not pay attention to it. That year however, as if in spite, it was a plentiful year. The tomatoes grew many and big on tall stems and the garden beds were thick with thin long wooden sticks around which bean stocks were wrapped around.

My parents knew that our store full with alcoholic drinks and cigarettes make a tempting target for thieves and robbers, particularly groups of robbers and soliders who would throw themselves at liquor sooner than at gold. They also knew that for liquor one can get just about anything in time of war.

In the quiet of the night, my father and I made a few trips to the store bringing out a couple hundred bottles of liquor, among them some two dozen bottles of spirit 96% pure alcohol which was twice as strong as vodka and twice as valuable. The spirit and half the vodka we packed in sacks inbetween straw. Under cover of night we pulled up carefully the bean plants with the long sticks that they were wrapped around, dug a hole in the ground and carefully lowered the bags with the liquor in it. After covering the hole, we spread the excess soil over the garden beds, replanting the beans, and putting the long sticks in their original places.

The next morning when I went into the garden to see if our last nights job was noticeable, I was very proud of our job. Not only would a stranger not notice anything, but even I could not see anything suspicious.

The police advised the public to build bomb shelters. Nothing elaborate, just a hole in the garden or yard, whoever can should cover it wit boards and pile earth or stones on top.

I tried to dig a hole in our yard but gave it up shortly. The ground was too rocky. The most impressive shelter I saw in shtetl was at Daniel Maister, or Daniel the blacksmith as he was known. His daughter, Maya was one of the five girls from our group. She told us that her father and brothers built something good. We boys went to see it. It was a ditch a meter wide by two meters deep, dug in a "U" shape, each side some five meters long. A total of fifteen meters. Quite a roomy shelter. Besides the two openings or exits, it was all covered with boards which in turn were covered with a thick layer of soil on top of which there was a pile of wood, which was prepared for winter as fire wood.

With so much room they not only took in clothing and dishes, but even furniture.

As just about everyone had something buried, people worried about theft, that is, somebody should not dig up somebody else's hole. So neighbors organized night watches. That is, every ten fifteen neighbors got

together and took turns in patrolling the neighborhood. Each patrol consisted of two-three men. In our house, we divided the night into two. I used to patrol up to one or two in the morning, and my father used o take over after me until daybreak.

Apparently nobody slept well, for instead of the expected two or three men on watch, there were always four or five and more. In our case we patrolled the market square, walking into yards to look for something suspicious. So while walking, we used to meet other groups from neighboring areas, chat a bit and sit down for a rest.

The nights were so quiet and the moon bright even the mosquitos did not dare to buzz. A couple of times during those peaceful nights, I heard the distant drone of a single aeroplane reminding us of the carnage that is taking place not so far away.

Who could have imagined how poorly the Polish army is fairing already in the first week of the war. Newspapers failed to appear. The government or to be more precise the local authorities took away all vehicles. The only news came from the neighboring shtetl, Pruzany, where they knew as little as we. The only news came via the radio which kept on playing patriotic and marshal music with constant interruptions of coded commands.

One did not have to be a genius to know that things did not look good. The often announcements that the army moved to earlier prepared positions told the story.

One the third day of the war our mood changed for the better. After we had heard that England and France declared war on Germany. Those that had experience from the first world war, including my father, warned that it will take months before England and France will have enough soldiers to open another front. They expressed their hope that Poland will be able to hold back Germany for the next few months, until such time.

The first ten days went by uneventfully. One could not believe that Poland is at war. One late afternoon appeared a plane over head. It did not look impressive nor threatening. After a couple of circle around the shtetl the plane opened fire. It lasted no more than ten seconds if that much but enough to make everyone run in all directions. There were no soldiers in or around Shershev nor any military installations and nobody knew what he was shooting at. Unless he was trying to "Draw the bear out of the forest." In any case, he made another circle or two and went his way leaving behind a subject of conversation for a day or two.

After those first ten days the first refugees began to appear. Those wer civillian Poles that were running from the approaching Germans. Those

were people well dressed and looked prosperous. They travelled with their own cars even limousines. Despite the fact that all private vehicles in our part of the county were mobilized. They paid good money (prices) for whatever they bought and were prepared to pay vast sums for gasoline that was not available in Shershev for any price.

Among those refugees drove in her own car, the wife of the "Wojewoda" (Governor) of our province "Poliesie" Kostek Bernacki. Her daughter turned to the local police for help, regarding gasoline, but even they could not turn up any, for there was none to be gotten.

Somebody suggested "Denaturat" (Rubbing alcohol). The chief of police came to my father and ordered him to give them all the "Denaturat" there was in the store. The driver filled up the car tank and they drove away.

The following couple days more refugees appeared. They were mostly young Poles, many had brand new rifles on their shoulders made in Belgium. They were in much better condition than the army used. Those refugees too behaved properly, paid for whatever the bought and moved on south towards the Rumanian border, four-five hundred kilometers south. To our surprise, there were no Jewish refugees.

A day or two later we woke up to find out that the local police disappeared. Shershev remained without a government or someone to keep order. Although Shershev did not experience any "pogroms" in the last couple hundred years, the Jewish population was very much informed about the pogroms that took place in the Ukraine and Volinia, a hundred kilometers to the south.

What was worse, was the fact that the Christians in and around Shershev knew about it and they also knew that the pogromist were never punished for their acts.

The Shershev Jews took the possibility of a pogrom very serious. Especially when someone of the Christians began to talk about it in the market square, the center of the Jewish habitat.

Some of the prominent members of the Jewish community got together and decided to send a delegation to the nearby district town Pruzany, in the hope that there is still a government representation and to see what can be done.

A delegation left with sunrise by horse and buggy. To everybodys surprise they were back before dark with ten rifles and ten cartridges. The rifles were of a very old vintage but operational. What was to be a secret is the amount of cartridges (ten) that came with them. Would the potential pogromists have known, it would not have stopped a pogrom.

Jewish men, former soldiers, that were not mobilized, or were sent back home from the railway station during the last and total mobilization, due to lack of uniforms or rifles, volunteered to patrol the town square, where the bulk of the potential pogromists used to gather, especially in the evening. Now and then the armed men in twos used to patrol the Jewish streets and alleys at night. In this way there were always ten armed men in the street, day and night, which effected both sides to a degree. It held in check the potential pogromists and to a certain degree gave a sense of tranquility to the Jewish population.

How long ten armed Jews with one cartridge per rifle could protect the entire Jewish community is questionable. There were rumors that the villages around are organizing to join the local non Jewish population in a pogrom. There was even an attempt to kill the most feared Jew in town. It was the blacksmith Srulkah (Isroel) Mayster. He was both strong and fearless.

In one of those lawless nights he was sitting at his brother Daniel's house on Kamieniecka Street, which was except of a few houses, entirely non Jewish. He most likely came to his brother to discuss the uncertain situation in town, when somebody fired at him from the street. That Srulkah had the presence of mind to slam his heavy callous hand on the glass kerosine lamp, shattering it and throwing the room into darkness. Thus depriving the would be assassin of another chance to fire at him. The people in the house could see a man running away but did not dare give chase to a man with a gun in his hand.

From the only operating at times radio station in Warsaw, we could gather that there as not much of Poland left. Yet there was no sign of war in our parts. People began to listen to radio Muscov, whose language was understood by almost all.

On the 17th of September radio Muscov announced that there is no more Polish army and that the Red Army crossed the Polish border.

The following day, the 18th of September the day the German army closed the ring around Warsaw, the Soviet foreign minister Molotov delivered a speech on the radio reiterating the fact that the Red Army marched into Poland in order to protect their brethern, the Ukraninians and Belarussians in time of need. A day or two later the Muscov radio announed that the artificial Polish government left the country, leaving our brethern to their fate.

I am not sure if it was the same day or a day later, at about three in the afternoon, a group of a couple dozen peasants drove on bicycles into

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town with rifles on their shoulders. It was a diverse assortment of weapons one had never seen, except in a museum. Some really belonged there. They came from the north western direction, the only sandy approach to the shtetl. Some of them were known to the local Jews as belonging to the village of Krinica (not to be confused with Krinica in the Carpatian mountains).

They drove right into the main street Mostowa, which was entirely Jewish. They encountered the first two man patrol, one of them was my father's brother Reuven. The two man patrol, finding itself surrounded by a couple dozen armed mean, realized their situation and gave up their rifles. Having disarmed the first patrol they proceeded in the direction of the centre, the market square, disarming on the way the other patrols.

Entering the market square, where, they found a large crowd of people who did not know what to make of it, they ordered the store keepers to open the stores and continue to do business. Our store remained closed because of what we were selling.

Their spokesman announced in front of a still growing crowd, that they are part of an underground communist organization which is taking over the law and order in town until a representative of the Soviet Union will arrive.

In a sense the crowd sighed with relief, for would they be pogromist they would not need this performance. They had already disarmed the patrols. Secondly some of the local Jews knew some of those men as decent people.

The store keepers opened up the stores. Not being able to enter our store, I went over to see what was doing in my grandfather's store.

A short while later a part of the armed men came in. The one that seemed to be in charge told my grandfather to make sure to stay open until six and to open tomorrow at eight. The spokesman seemed to enjoy his new acquired importance pronouncing each word with exaggerated authority. Still he left every one in his charge to add a remark or two.

Despite my sixteen years and lack of life experience, I watched with a keen eye the attitute of the group of armed men. They strode across the heavy wooden floor with a new acquired confidence walking over to the shelves, opening little and large boxes, looking into every carton and corner. I heard one exclaiming "Eto nashe, eto vsio nashe." (It is ours, it is all ours). I felt that all it would take to transform this supposedly communist, the defender of that beautiful ideal, into a potential pogromist was a word or a nod from his superior.

I suddenly saw how volotile the temperament of those people is and how easy it is to convert it from a human into a beast.

That night Jews did not patrol their streets, nor did they sleep restfully.

The next morning those very men made an attempt to organize some order and temporary governing body in shtetl. They took over the police station and even recruited a few local young men into their ranks among them a couple of Jews.

A day or two later rumors began to circulate that the Soviet army entered Pruzany.

Still it took a couple more days before we saw representatives of the Soviet Union It was in the from of a couple truck loads of soldiers, that stopped in the market square. They were immediately surrounded by a mob of locals who were bombarding them with all kinds of questions.

Their looks and attire was not impressive. The uniforms were very simple and devoid of any decorative addition Their boots well worn, Russian style, pushed down accordion like. The hat unattractive with a cloth point on top.

The riffles long and the long byonettes on them made them look even longer, towering over the soldiers. The unusual long bionettes had no sheaths and dangled pitifully from the soldiers belts or tied with a piece of cord to the gun barrel. The soldiers smoked self rolled cigarettes, rolled in newsprint, for tobacco they used what they called "Koroshky", chopped up tobacco stems. This picture evoke sympathy, even compassion among us, but I will admit some smugness.

The soldiers conducted them selves decently even politely, without using a single offensive or vulgar word which is unusual for soldiers. Yet looking at them closely the crowd detected a hidden want and began to shower them with questions about availability of all sorts of items in the Soviet Union. The answer was always the same: "U nas vsio yest." (we have everything.)

This answer became so automatic and popular everywhere in the first few weeks of the Soviets arrival that it turned in a joke, which goes like this: A group of locals who started to ask them the usual questions; is there enough bread in the Soviet Union? Yes answered their spokesman. Plenty . What about butter? Plenty, and sugar? All you want. Vodka? You will get all you can drink. Tzores? (Trouble-misery in Yiddish.) Not knowing what it meant but not wanting to let them know that he did not know what it is but

assumed that it was an ordinary thing, the Russian answered: Yes, plenty. And we will send you ten carloads soon.

Still, that first day the few Soviet soldiers were welcomed guests. We realized tht they represent a country and government that came to stay permanently. After all, they have been here for a couple hundred years before and under Bolshevic rule where Jews are not being persecuted, what can go wrong?

Meantime we remained under the supervision of the temporary committee, the armed group from Krinica including the few local men uder the command of a man from Krenica with the name of Liesicky.

Now the only source of news was radio Moscov to which we listened regularly. On the 28th of September radio Moscov announced that Warsaw capitulated. Moscow did not hide its joy and gloating about the fall of the Polish capital.

On October 5th 1939 Hitler reviewed his soldiers at a march past on Aleje Ujazdowskie in Warsaw. The Moscow radio kept on reporting every move. We Jews resented Moscows action, but at the same time we were grateful to the Soviet Union for coming to us instead of the Germans. We knew the Jews of Poland under Hitler won't have it easy, but what evolved in the end……

In the nearby town of Pruzany the Soviets have settled in. Besides the military came many civilians, mostly party members.

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THESE ARE PAGES 298-350!!!!!!!!!!

They ~~came~~ WERE named "Easteners" by the local people, as they came from Russia, the East. Almost two weeks after the Red Army crossed the Polish border, some dozen Easteners came to Shershev. They rented rooms from the locals. Those with families rented part of homes and moved in with their meager possessions.

Shortly after, more and more started to arrive in small groups or individually.

Meantime, in the last couple of weeks, the stores have been emptied or sold out. The populace sensed that not all if anything is available in the Soviet Union as the first soldiers or civilians were saying.

The experience of the first world war has taught the people that the two essensial items in hard times needed were salt and kerosine. Being an agrarian part of the world, food could be obtained to a more or lesser degree for money or barted from the farmers around. Salt and kerosine had to be bought from far away, thus making it at time unobtainable.

The demand for the two above mentioned items created a panic in town. People began hording, as the stores one after another began to close.

The reason being two fold. Firstly, the storekeepers were deprived of their source of supply which was mostly located in the western, industrialized, part of Poland, now under German control. But even the bit of industry in the eastern part of Poland, now under Soviet control, too, came to a stop as all commerce ceased to function.

The second reason was that the Soviets devaluated the Polish zloty to the value of their ruble. This made any articles dirt cheap, particularly for the easteners, who kept on buying whatever was available and in quantities never seen before. The local population followed their example. As a result the stores were emptied in no time, and their doors closed.

In that first month of the Bolshevic arrival, so to say the "honey-moon" time, people felt free and liberated. Jews went on Saturday to the synagogues, Christians to their churches. In general, an elated mood prevailed all around.

On a bright Saturday morning, while my father and I were sitting in the synagogue, in walks in my middle little sister Sonia (Sara), who was then eight years old and tells us that the Soviet, to be more precise, the local police, by then called "Militia", are conducting a search in our house. We

Chapter 9

~~This file contains pages 440 -~~

The officer in charge positions himself in front of us, so that we can all see him. In a loud voice he yells "Judenrat" (Jewish committee),step forwards. My father whispers to me; Now they will finish off the committee. Those of the committee that are with us step forwards. The officer asks; Can any of you read a map? The doctor, a member of the committee, hesitantly takes a step forward. The officer takes out a map from his pouch, shows a point of the map to the doctor and says, here you are, seven kilometers down the road is a place called Antopol, from here on you can continue on your own. There you will find your women and children.

With those words, the Germans turn to the boys holding their bicycles, mount them and without looking around, peddle back the way we came.

For a moment we think that it is another Germans trick, but they disappear in the distance. We realize that we are free. The first impulse is to fall in each others arms for joy that we are alive. That joy lasts for seconds, for immediately the realization sets in of the events of the last thirsty six hours and the dozens of unmarked graves we left behind.

Exactly how many slained there were in those two days nobody knew, but we figured anywhere between seventy five and a hundred.

What do we do now. We cannot go back. Some of us know this road and agree that it leads to Antopol. Antopol was more or less the same size as Shershev but with somewhat of a larger Jewish population. Maybe they are still in their homes undisturbed. If so, they will take us in and let us catch our breath. To be among Jews in a Jewish home for a moment

The group of eaten crushed in spirit Jews starts to drag itselves forward to look for its wives and children. We are afraid to say a loud word. We speak in whispers. Rumors and assumptions are being mixed with despair and tears. Why? What have we done to deserve it? Where are our families? What have the Germans done with them?

With grieving and heavy hearts we drag our heavy feet. It is dark all around. There is not a light to be seen. Not a sign of a human presence.

The four of us, my father, his brother Reuven, the youngest Eli and I are walking together. Each burdened with his own dark thoughts. We make it finally to some houses. It is Antopol but in the street it is pitch dark. The first two men we stumble across are our own from Shershev. They got here abit earlier and tell us to be very quiet for there is great apprehension and fear

left the synagogue immediately. The first sign that something was taking place, we noticed, as soon as we reached the market square, on which our house was. A fair crowd of worshippers, from the next door to our house was the synagogue, stood trying to figure out what is happening.

With pounding hearts we entered our house to find my mother standing in the middle of the living room frightened and confused, with one hand around my seventeen year old sister, Sheva's shoulders and with the second, around my youngest, not yet seven year old sister Liba.

The house was full with men of the Militia, in singles or in twos, looking for something, opening drawers of every dresser (cupboard) and closet. They were all over the house, in every room, attic, cellar and even in the wood sheds.

I have mentioned earlier that we buried liquor in our garden, but not all that we took out from our store. Some of it we just left in the house in closets. It was not hidden nor was it difficult to find. When my father, I and my little brother entered the house, they had it all found and displayed on the floor. Yet they continued the search. I went up to the attic to see what the Militia men are doing there. As I came up I noticed in a side a big cardboard box with stationary stamps and correspondence that I kept up with the "Ntzivut" (head office) of the Beitar (right Zionist) in Warsaw. I realized the ignorance of the Militia men, for they looked into that box several times and ignored its contents. Would they have realized what it meant, they would have had enough evidence to send us all to Siberia. To be a Zionist under the Soviet rule was tantamount to being a counter revoluntionary.

A couple of the men went out to our yard and with a long thin sharp rod began to prod the ground to see if it hadn't been dug up lately, indicating that there might be something buried underneath. But the yard had been untouched for ages, except for a small spot where some six weeks earlier, I tried to dig for a bomb shelter but gave up, because of the hard and rocky ground. That spot looked suspicious to them and they kept on trying to stick the rod into it, but without success. The ground remained unyielding to them just as earlier to me.

At that time a thought went through my mind. What if they would tart looking in the garden? However, the garden was behind our neighbors wood shed and by all appearances looked as it belonged to him.

Not having found any more liquor the one in command ordered his men pack up whatever they found in a straw filled sac and they took it away.

It did not take long for us to find out what happened. A couple Jewish young men got carried away with the enthusiasm of the new "Liberators", the

Bolshevics and volunteered to work and cooperate with them. Any person with common sense understood that if we did not sell out our merchandise, we had to have it. In order to win favors and trust with the Bolshevics, one had to prove his loyalty by being willing and ready to squeal on someone even a friend or relative. Those couple of young men proved it by informing the Militia that we have vodka. One of them with the ironic name of "Tzodik" which means a pious man, saint, hade later the arrogance or insolence to brag about it.

My parents were very upset and uneasy about all this, reasoning that if the authorities, that by then were well staffed with easteners, who held all the major positions, as managers, supervisors, including a number of Militia men could come in the middle of the day to conduct a search for no reason at all and confiscate merchandise, who knows what else they can come up with.

The next day, Sunday, I dragged down from the attic the big box of the "Beitar" stationary, stamps and correspondence, throwing it into the oven, I slowly but thoroughly changed it into ashes.

As another couple days went by and we did not hear from the Militia, we began to hope that maybe they have us forgotten, that maybe being in possession of so much vodka they could not stand the temptation and drank it, annulling the whole affair, erasing it from the paper and from their memory. We began to sleep more relaxed.

A week or so later, sometime after midnight, we were awakened from an uneasy slumber by a loud banging on the door. In panic we all jumped out of our beds and quickly got dressed. Opening the door, we were confronted by two Militia men who came for our father. Without a word, they took him to their station.

Not having overcome last weeks horrifying event of the search, confused and scared with the mid-night crude awakening, in despair of her husband just being taken away, remembering the ruthlessness of the Bolshevics during their retreat in 1920, when their soldiers took away her wedding ring at which time she almost lost her finger, my mother grabbed me and my sister Sheva and with fervent intensive words said to us, "run to the Militia and don't let them shoot your father."

Her words left me stunned for a minute. The thought of my father being arrested was frightening enough, but to be shot? It never entered my mind. The two of us set out immediately for the Militia headquarters. On the way many frightening thoughts went though my mind, even the sight of my father being shot, which speed up our run.

Getting breathlessly to the door of the station a Militioneer barred our way in, telling us to wait outside. We remained outside not knowing what to do. We did not want to come back to our mother not having anything to say. We also understood that they would not shoot our father in the building but take him outside in the yard, in which case we would see him and implore them to have mercy on him, not to shoot.

With those dark thoughts, we remained standing on the sidewalk in front of the Militia station. The year long minutes changed into hours.

About the hours later, the front door opened and we saw our father coming out alone unescorted. We ran over bombarding him with all kinds of questions. Our father answered calmly, that the chief of the Militia said that, as the merchandise was not hidden, but simply in the house, he should come in the morning to pick it up and the following day to sell it out in the store.

Needless to describe our joy having our father back alive and free. Yet it is difficult to fathom the policy of a system where even a positive or benign message had to be delivered in such a frightening way.

In the morning my father hired a man with a horse and buggy and picked up the vodka taking it straight to our store.

The next morning my father and I went to the store. The news that there will be vodka on sale spread around the town the previous day and now there was a line up in front of the store. As the Soviet "Ruble" was valued even money with the previous Polish "Zloty", and vodka was in general not to be gotten, there was no wonder that a huge line up formed early in the morning.

Fortunately, there appeared a couple Militia men to keep order. At first the crowd grabbed vodka. When this was gone, one to a customer, the next went the liqueurs. I looked on as the shelves were being fastly emptied of the good and expensive "Baczewski" liqueur that were being sold before the war between fifteen to thirty zloty a bottle and are now being given away for the same amount of almost worthless now Soviet rubbles. When this was gone the crowd began to buy wine, which to be honest, was of poor quality. Next went the cigarettes and tobacco. At the end, went whatever there was left in "Denaturat" (methylated spirit).

In a matter of a couple of hours, our store was emptied out. We remained with a drawer full of nearly worthless rubbles.

It is my opinion that, that was the last time that liquor of such quality as "Baczewski" or tobacco, the quality of "Turecki Najprzedniejsze" was sold in Shershev ever since.

My parents looked around the empty shelves and walls of the store with a heavy heart, locked the triple doors that guarded nothing behind them and went home in a depressed mood.

The Bolshevics waanted to show that "everything is available" in the Soviet Union, as they said. And as there was a great demand for salt and kerosene, the two items that were plentiful there, they started to deliver.

First arrived a fifty ton carload of salt on the rail way station Linow Onancyce, thirty kilometers away. It arrived in bulk, like gravel or sand. A hundred local farmers were ordered to go there with their horses and buggies and take along their own bags.

The salt was unloaded in the front part of Kolosko's house, a Christian, who owned one of the two Christian houses in the market square. Before the war, this part of the house was a co-op store opened with the initiative of the Polish government, to take away business from the Jewish storekeepers.

The next day, from early morning there was a line up for the kilo salt per customer. The fear of the population that there might be a shortage of salt drove them to get in line time after time until the fifty tons of salt was gone. Each customer had to bring his or her own container, or little sack, for there were no bags available. I looked at the salt and thought to my self that nobody would have touched this coarse and lumpy stuff before the war. Now they are willing to stay in line for hours to buy a kilo.

Yet to think that 50 tons of that stuff was sold in a matter of a few hours, more than it would be sold in Shershev in a year in normal times.

After this was sold, Shershev had to wait another two months for more.

Suddenly to me and y parents something became clear; it happened a couple weeks earlier, before the search. With the first group of easteners (Soviets) that arrived in Shershev was a single tall man with a face scarred from small pox that made him look very stern and anti-pathetic. His name was Kulakov.

Shortly after their arrival one evening we heard a rap on the door. It was Kulakov. Coming in he introduces himself to my parents politely and asked forgiveness for barging in. Getting the expected answer that he is welcome, he asked if he may sit down.

My parents spoke a fluent Russian, not like the majority around us who spoke with a white Russian (Belaruss) dialect. It did not take long for a conversation to develop. It turned out that he heard that my father used to sell vodka and he was wondering if by chance we might have a bottle left. My father obliged him with a bottle and a lengthy conversation ensued,

during which Kulakov asked my father how many bottles of vodka did he sell a day. My father answered about one hundred and one hundred and fifty a day. Kulakov's face showed no expression, a conditioning or training that every Soviet functionary must teach himself, in order not to betray his inner thoughts, so as to asure his survival under the Soviet regime. Instead almost with a boastful tune, he said: in the Soviet Union we can sell a car load or two a day. We were stunned, how is it possible? It can't be!!

The conversation finally ended. Kulakov thanked my father for the vodka and left. When the door closed behind him, my father turned to my mother and said: A car load a day? Impossible!!

It did not take long for us to realize that Kulakov was not boasting. When two months later a second car load of salt arrived, the line ups were even longer than the first time. It was no secret that every family had enough salt to last at least a year or two, but the fear of a shortage compelled people to buy more.

Now we understood what Kulakov meant when he said that in the Soviet Union they an sell a carload of vodka a day.....

Shortly after the salt, arrived a cistern with kerosene. But how does the kerosene get out of Shershev? You cannot pour it out of the cistern into sacks or boxes. So the local Militia went around the shtetl confiscating from the former store keepers the barrels that they used to bring the kerosene in.

Again some of the local farmers and Jewish wagon drayers were sent with the empty barrels to the rail way station, where they pumped out the kerosene into the barrels and brought them home.

The kerosene arrived in Shershev early in the morning. They were ordered to unload the barrels near our store. At seven in the morning some official knocked at our door and told my father that the kerosene will be sold from our store and if we, that is, my father and I want, we can help with the distribution.

I dressed quickly and went to our store. By that time all the town knew of the kerosene and the line seemed to be a kilometer long, men, woman and children, each with some vessel in hand waiting for that liter of kerosene. As expected, as soon as they got it, they went back in line for another liter.

Although the electricity in town was restored shortly after the arrival of the Bolshevics, the demand for kerosene did not slackened.

By six in the evening, all the kerosene was sold out. Some bureaucrats took the keys of the store and never returned.

We, with the arrival of the Bolshevics, did not see the Red army as such. The small groups or detachments of soldiers that used to pass by and at times

stop over for a few hours, consisted of village boys or peasant boys, good natured, good humored and warm hearted. That manifested itself often among the Russian masses. Their simplicity or primitivity and poverty used to awaken sympathy, even compassion among the locals.

The new authority took over the few former Polish government buildings and rented some space in some private homes.

The school year started late and did not co-ordinate with all the new Soviet acquired territories. I went back to Brest-Litowsk. Back to the dorms on 66 Trzeciego-Maja Street. There were being made changes at school and in the dorms. The dorms that were under the management of the Jewish Ort and were Kosher became a government institution. The same happened to the school that was compelled to conform to Soviet whim.

On the very street where our dorms were located and no more than half a kilometer down the road, was a pure race Polish technical school, which was known in the city and its environs as a hot bed of anti-semitism, and where a Jewish student would not dare set foot.

The Soviet education department decided to unite the two schools, the Jewish Ort school with that Polish school, so called "Technical school."

But before I continue with the events in school, I would like to set apart a few lines to describe the changes that took place in our dormitories under Soviet rule.

The personnel that worked there before, that is, the kitchen staff, cleaning staff, even the house keeping staff, remained the same. After all, they were the working class. But the manager, the so called director, was replaced.

The new director was a Jew from central Poland, who apparently had a past association with communism in order to get such a responsible job. I must admit however that if he had, he did not belong to the barely literate Bolshevics that came from the east (Soviet Union) to manage, bully and rule over us. He belonged to the rare category of human beings that became communists out of deep conviction and with the holy goal of improving the lot of the oppressed masses and creating a better tomorrow for humanity. He was the sort of idealist who can attain his belief only with the help of the highest intellect and boundless faith. He was also a good administrator. The most outstanding quality, which did not escape our notice was his approach to us students. He saw and understood each and every one of us and tied hard to do and help as much as it was possible. It was obvious that he had experience in this field . One evening shortly after my return, the director called us students together and delivered a short speech. The contents of that

speech I do not remember any longer, except for his closing remark, which went something like this : "It is said that life is short, but three years is a long time. Remember that you come here to spend three years together, so see to it that you make those three years as comfortable for youselfs and the others as you wish them to be."

For a sixteen year old, as myself, those were impressive words that they remained in my memory.

When I think sometimes of those days, this man comes to my mind and I wonder what happened to that gifted, talented and dedicated man.

My assumption is that he perished together with the old established and numerous Jewish community of Brest-Litowsk. Taking in consideration, that the city fell to the Germans within the first hour of the start of the war.

But then *in* October of 1939 and despite the fact that the entire population, Jewish and Christian, already understood that the Soviet Union is not the dream they conceived it to be Never the less, the mood among the people, especially the youths, was exalted or elated.

As the dorms were under Soviet control and not any more under Jewish, some twenty five non Jews enrolled there. Those were Polish high school students of the upper grades from western Poland, who escaped the Germans and now found themselves trapped under Soviet rule.

They felt uncomfortable among a majority of Jews and due to the Soviet law of equal minority rights, they had to put up with us unable even to utter the word "Jew," "Zyd" in Polish, but refer to a Jew as "Yevrey" (Hebrew or Israelite.)

In the late months of 1939 great mass exchanges took place on the newly acquired Soviet territories, especially on the new formed borders of the Soviet Union and Germany. Jews from central and western Polan found themselves under Nazi occupation, ran eastwards towards the Soviet Union and Poles from eastern Poland that found themselves under Soviet rule ran westwards, towards German occupied Poland.

Here one could see the hate and comtempt the Poles had for the Russian Bolshevics. Although it was the Nazis that attacked Poland and destroyed its army and occupied its land, while the Bolshevics entered a non-existing any more Poland. Abandoned by her leaders and defenders, they preferred to live under a Nazi Germany rather than the Soviets.

One late fall day, the twenty odd young Poles failed to show up in the dorms. Following the example of many other Poles, they crossed the border to Germany.

Up to than, in all the sixteen years of my life, I have never tasted "Traif" (non Kosher forbidden by Jewish dietary law) food. Although it used to intrigue, puzzle me, the look of pork, which was the staple food and source of meat and fat of the local non Jewish population. Nor did I know of any Jew in Shershev that had ever tasted it, except for those who served in the army but used to give it up as soon as they returned home.

There was the general belief among Jews that pork fat is very healthy. Rationalizing it with the fact that non Jews used to apply it on sores or wounds to speed up the healing.

Our breakfast used to consist of bread and butter with tea or black coffee. When not butter, each used to get a piece of cheese or sausage. One could have all the bread he desired, but the rest was allocated.

With the Bolshevics, even the bread was rationed for a month, but later there was bread aplenty. In the morning we used to get three slices of thinly buttered bread for breakfast and three dry slices of bread for lunch.

Fortunately, my parents used to send me from home dry cheese and honey for my bread. The boys from farther away like Volinia or places like Baranowicz, Slonim, Wolkowisk, Mejczade, Nowogrodek was more difficult. The distance was too great to send perishable food. Even more difficult was for boys from the west side of the river Bug, who were cut off from their families by the newly created German Soviet border.

Slowly our food began to improve, we started to receive cheese for breakfast.

One morning we unexpectedly received a piece of sausage. Immediately a rumor started circulating that the sausage is "Trief" (non Kosher). I look around my table and others to see that many eat it with gusto, but others hesitate. Finally unable to resist the temptation they start eating it. I see at my table everyone is eating and so as far as I can see are the others. I bite into it. The taste is the same as last years Kosher one. I console my self that it may be Kosher.

That night lying in bed I torment myself with the thought that I made myself unclean because of a piece of sausage. I waited six weeks for a piece of sausage and it will most probably take another six before they will serve it again, if not longer. Was it worth it???

I decided that night, or whatever was left of the sleepless night, not to eat it again. This time we did not have to wait six weeks Within a couple of days sausage was served again. This time I did not vacillate this much and ate it, as I realized that sausage will become a frequent part of our diet. That night again I felt a twinge of conscience, more than that, outright remorse,

but I slept. When sausage was again served a couple of days later I did not make a big deal of it, but I felt that I had lost something decent, something humane.

We used to spend eight hours at school, four with theoretical lessons and four with practical. The theoretical ones consisted of subjects lie mathematics, geometry, physics, metalurogy , and the Russian language. Most of the teachers and instructors were the same pre war Polish ones. I have however, to admit, that despite the reputation of that technical school as an anti-semetic reptile hole, the teacher personnel behaved towards the Jewish students correctly. The non Jewish students found it more difficult, but all they could do was to grin and bear it.

There were quite a few families in Shershev whose joy of being under Soviet rule instead of German did not lift their spirits. I am referring to the families whose husbands and sons were serving or were mobilized into the Polish army and did not return after the war. Among them were my paternal grandparents whose son Eli which was mobilized in March of 1939. This fact effected all of us, his extended family.

My grandmother, Chinka, used to putter around the house crying all day. My father and his brother, Reuben, used to come to them almost every day to encourage them and give them hope.

Finally my father decided to travel to Brest-Litowsk to see if he can find out something in the provincial capital.

There was no time to write me that my father was coming, so he called me by telephone. This in itself, was no easy task. The couple private phones in Shershev were disconnected. The only way was to call from the post office in Shershev to the one in Brest-Litowsk, which entailed my being there at the specified time. It would take too much time to describe the process. Eventually we got together on the phone, my first in live conversation on the phone in Yiddish.

I knew than the workings of a telephone, why I was surprised to hear his voice and in Yiddish, I did not know than nor now.

My father arrived with a "small" delay of twenty four hours, due to the chaotic rail way schedule. After finding a place in a boarding house, which some locals secretly ran, my father came to see me in the dorm.

After a long conversation my father left with the hope of finding out something about his brother. We also decided to meet tomorrow in a restaurant which were already all government owned.

When I met my father the next afternoon at the appointed place, I found him very discouraged after telling me about his encounter with the Soviet

bureaucrats . That got him nowhere. He decided to leave for the railway station that very same evening hoping to get train for home.

As we were leaving the restaurant I noticed in my father words, a sense of resignation that I have never known before. I felt heavy at heart bordering on anguish. This feeling was not strange to me concerning my mother whom I loved more than anything in the world. As I watched her busying in the kitchen and house from early morning to late at night. She used to make sure that everything was in order and in place and that each of us was looked after. She manifested so much tenderness and sympathy not only for us but for strangers whose troubles and suffering used to move her to tears.

My father, like most fathers in those days, must have learned to control their emotion, at least outwardly, not to show them, not only in relation towards other, strangers, but even towards their own families.

While I never let my children and grandchildren forget that I love them, demonstrating it by kissing and hugging,I, my friend and contemporaries in those days never heard it or had it from their fathers Not even a compliment.

I took leave of my father with the usual hand shake and turned in the direction of the dorms. Before I made ten steps, I suddenly felt an acute twinge, a sort of pang of sympathy and love for my father, which was more intense than I ever felt before. I turned back to watch him go in the direction of the rail way station. To my surprise I noticed that at the very same moment he turned away from watching me walk away. Not wanting me to know that he was watching me, but it betraying his weaker side, namely that he cared and loved me.

At that very moment I asked myself the question; Why did I have to wait almost seventeen years to find out that my father really did care and love me and by the same token all my siblings. Why didn't he give at least a hint, besides providing us with all the things we needed, which at that time we foolishly took for granted.

Actually I shouldn't have been surprised, for I knew of any of my friends fathers or other fathers in shtetl that acted differently,

Shortly after we were informed in school that wih the approaching October revolution celebration, there will be a parade inwhich all schools will participate, including ours.

And so it was that on the October day our school took up its assigned place in the line. Besides schools, there were military units and workers of all sorts. It seemed that there are more participants in the march-by than onlookers.

We marched by a platform of high Soviet civilian and military officials. To my surprise after this platform there was another one much smaller on which there were German military men.

Some hundred meters or so past the two platforms we were told to disband and join the mass onlookers. We tried to get to the platforms as close as possible, being interested in seeing the Soviet big shots more than the parade itself.

As soon as the march-by was over cars began to pull up in front of the two platforms and the distinguished guests started to get in.

Something happened suddenly which I nor the other bystanders did not expect. While the Soviet big shots started getting in to their limos, the crowd started to approach the smaller platform of the Germans threatening them ith fists and shoving them with all kinds of curses, swearings and abuses in any languages, like Yiddish, Russian, Polish and even German.

It is possible that that was the only time when Jews had an opportunity to swear at Germans undauntedly.

The circle of the threatening mob was getting tighter around the Germans and it seemed that within seconds, they will reach them. Apparently the Bolshevics forsaw such a possibility and were ready for any eventuality. From nowhere, appeared a detachment of N.K.V.D. (Security Police.) and surrounded the platform. The crowd knew better than to start with the Soviet security police and stopped in their tracks.

Considering that 75% of Brest-Litowsk's population was Jewish and that the German army did get into the city, where in the three day stay there before the Bolshevics took it over, the Germans emptied every Jewish store and many houses of everything, is it than a wonder that the Jewish Brest-Litowsk reacted with such hostility towards the German representation.

However, the fact that the Soviets have invited Germans to celebrate with them did not go well with the local Jewish population.

In the fall of that year 1939 the Jewish population of Brest-Litowsk had increased tremendously. Many Jews came there that were retreating from approaching Germans and even more from the occupying Germans. The newly order between Germany and the Soviet Union was half a dozen kilometers from the center of the city. It seems that the Germans let the boarder poorly guarded deliberately so the Jews could get across to the Soviet side.

Brest-Litowsk was full of refugees. Many succeeded in finding a room or rooms or any kind of accommodation others unfortunately no. They moved into synagogues, Jewish public buildings into hallways of apartment

buildings. The saddest sight for me was when I used to go home by train and see those refugees packed together on the floor and to get to the door leading to the train, one had to be very careful not to step on some refugee laying one next to the other on the floor.

And in such crowded quarters, they lived, not knowing what to do. The sanitary conditions were appaulling and rumors of spreading diseases began to circulate. Their situation became so intolerable that some decided to return home, under Nazi rule.

The winter 1939-40 was the coldest in my memory. The temperature went down to -35c and stayed there for a long time. In those bitter cold nights the Bolshevics decided to solve the refugee problem. By than the border between the Soviet Union and Germany was shut tight.

The Soviets brought many cattle cars and in the middle of the night started rounding up the refugees and lock them up in those cars.

This rounding up lasted three days and the Bolshevics succeeded in emptying the city of Brest-Litowsk of refugees. Apparently the Boshevics had a lot of experience with transporting large masses of people.

I found out later that this happened in many cities and towns in the newly acquired territories.

Why the Bolshevics did it was not explained, nor did anybody dare to ask. What is true is, that there was a law in the Soviet Union that forbade foreigners to even be within one hundred kilometers from a border. It is also possible that they feared that among the many thousands of refugees, there might be German spies of which the Bolshevics were watchful.

No matter what the reason, that cruel act of shipping as many as one hundred thousand innocent people to Siberia, that seemed at that time so gruesome and hideous, turned out to be for them a favour. For despite their hardship and suffering in Siberia, the majority of them survived the war.

Coming back to October 1939, at the end of the month, arrived a Soviet manager. A man of about forty in a well tailored military uniform with the rank of lieutenant. Taking in consideration his low officers rank, I must admit that he had experience in his assumed duty. He stepped into his role with true idealism and exampliary zeal. For example, we had a delivery of firewood, which arrived in one meter long chunks. The wood was dumped in the midle of the yard and were supposed to have been piled into the wood sheds. The Soviet manager could have ordered us to bring it in and stock it up properly. Instead he set an example and started doing it himself By it moving us to join him voluntarily and earning a lot of respect among us.

I will add that to us, boarders of the dorms, he conducted himself more like a comrade than a superior, taking in consideration that he was at least twice as old as the oldest among us and an officer used to give orders.

Apparently, he had influence or pull in high places, for with his arrival our food had noticeably improved.

By that time we all knew that it is advisable to keep ones mouth shut and not to talk too much, particularly about politics and criticism of the Soviet Union. However, the event that took place during the October parade remained a topic of conversation in the dorms for weeks. Some evenings later, the new manager himself remarked during a talk to us, how hated the Germans were, giving as an example that event.

He must have felt that it is safe to show his antipathy towards the Germans to an entirely Jewish group of students, considering the fact that the Soviets only "friendly" link with the outside world at that time was Germany and outer Mongolia.

From home, I used to get mail and parcels regularly so to speak. In fact, there was nothing that was regular. There was no more any means of transportation by bus from Shershev to Pruzany. The buses that used to commute between Shershev and Bialowieza, or Shershev, Pruzany, Brest-Litowsk were mobilized at the outbreak of the war and never replaced. All that was left were a couple of horse and buggy owners . (Wagon drayers) that were trying to eke out a living by driving people from Shershev to Pruzany. At times one could hitch hike a ride with a passing by Soviet vehicle.

If one managed finally to get to the rail way station in Oranczyce-Linovo, the train was never one time. The waiting time could be anywhere from six hours to a couple of days. It took many months till the trains became more dependable.

I sued to correspond often with my parents. One day I got from them a latter in which they informed me that the local officialdom ordered them to vacate the house, giving them three days time to move out. This event nneds a little explanation. There was a law in the Soviet Union that one family cannot own a house bigger than one hundred and thirteen square meters. As ours was bigger and one of the most recently built they decided to what they called "nationalize" it. In simple words, take it away without any compensation.

No court and no appeal could help. Besides, there were a few points stuck against us. Firstly, my parents were considered Capitalist, secondly, being a merchant and thirdly my grandfather was the town mayor. Those

points made us a very undesirable element in the eyes of the Bolshevics, an element that could at any time expect a one way ticket to Siberia.

Not wanting to antagonize them, my parents hired our former wagon drayer that used to haul for us the liquor from Linowo-Oranczyce. The same young man that took a loan from my father to buy a partnership in a truck a couple years before the war. During those three days, he moved our furniture and everything else to my paternal grandparents. They moved into the same three rooms we used to live in when I took sick at the age of three.

Fortunately, my parents did not write how they felt or feel now having to leave their own house. I remember a little of my thoughts. Seeing before my eyes, the attention they were paying while the house was being built. The local people used to say that my father is putting into it his body and soul, as if he is going to live forever. (How right they were.) Here comes total strangers and tell us to leave it and get out.

In a way I was glad that I was not there. To have to look a my mother's tears, which would have hurt me much more than the loss of the house.

It was difficult for me to imagine what it will be like, to come now to Shershev and instead to go to our large and comfortable home to drive up or walk up to my grandparents house and be content with three rooms and a shared kitchen.

As life has taught me time and time again, the proverb that "if you spend a night with your affliction it becomes your own." So it was with me. Slowly I got used to the idea.

From my parents later letters I found out that the Bolshevics "nationalized" seven houses in town, six Jewish and one Christian. All were in the market square, where they were the nicest and biggest houses. I will start with ours, one, Alter Gelershtein, known as Alter Esther-Goldes, two, Pavel Setar (Christian), three, Shalom Aronowicz, four, his brother Reuven Aronowicz, five, Yoshua Pinsky, six and Chatzkel (Jehezkel) Krugman, seven.

The largest house in town, Joshua Pinsky's, where he lived and where he had his store, the Drogyst lived with the family and drugstore. All this was converted into the headquarters of the Bolshevic party. There were separate offices for the first, second and third secretary of the party, as well as offices of the smaller functionaries.

Joshua Pinsky was permitted to live in his second small little house behind his big one. The pharmacy moved to Chatzkel Krugman's house. He Krugman, was permitted to remain in two rooms attached to his house. The pharmacy owner with her daughter, Lola, and older daughter, Mary with her

husband, the town doctor, rented some rooms in the Chazir Alley and the Aronowicz brothers moved in with one of their brother-in-law's Israel Wisoker.

The Hebrew School was closed and Hebrew was forbidden to learn. They returned to "Mammah-Loshn" Yiddish.

In November, I received good news that my father's youngest brother, Eli, (Eliyahu) returned from German captivity. He was home and well. A couple weeks later, he came to Brest-Litowsk to complete some formalities. We spent that evening together on the run, as he had a few place to go. I admired his collectiveness. After all, only two weeks earlier he was in German captivity. How soon he adjusted to normal life.

To his experience in the short war and German captivity, I will come back later. Meantime I want to return to the settling in of the Bolshevics on our territories.

Brest-Litowsk was known to have a formidable fortress. As a result the city suffered much destruction in the first world war. Between the two wars, the Polish government rebuilt the fortress and so did the city. In 1939, the fortress was bombed by the Germans, inadvertently, to a small degree the city. However, the city became even of more important strategical value, due to the fact that it was right on the newly created German Soviet border. The Bolshevics not only rebuilt the partly destroyed fortress but extended it greatly.

The city was full of military personnel and many Jewish families rented them out rooms. The Soviets were not very fastidious and I am speaking about officers, the ordinary soldiers lived outside the city. The officers were content with two rooms per family. They were not used to anything better. The single men lived two or even four to a room.

What did impress the local population was the size and number of the Soviet tanks and motorized artillery. What we have seen before the war of Polish tanks would look like toys in comparison to the Soviet tanks. What concerns motorized artillery, I doubt if Poland had any.

Almost opposite our dorms were large barn like sheds surrounded by a high fence. Before the war, the Poles kept some dozen tanks and a handfull of armored vehicles. That was all that Poland could afford to keep in such an important strategic place like Brest-Litowsk. The fenced in yard around those sheds was big enough to conduct manoevers.

The Bolshevics filled those sheds and the entire yard with tanks and other military equipments, but nobody had an idea what was really in there, because of the high fence.

Meantime he Soviet Union became entangled in a war with its neighbor in the north west, Finland, a country with three and a half million people, a tenth of the population of Poland, but resisted the Soviets with a ferocity as if it had ten times the population of Poland. The Soviet did not expect such opposition, nor did they expect that this small in number country will put them to shame in front of the whole world. They decided therefore, to use all the forces they had available at hand and over run Finland.

Apparently, a large portion at hand was then on the newly acquired territories of Poland. On a bright frosty morning the gates of that eternally closed yard opened up and Soviet tanks started to spill out.

The gate was on a small side street that led to our, wide street "Trzeciego Maja". The tanks turned right on our street, passing our dorms, continued on. The secret that they are going towards Finland could not be kept and did not surprise anybody. What was a surprise, was the amount of tanks that were there.

As everything in the Soviet Union was secretive, they kept the tanks leaving during the day time hours. But at night, they kept on going without a break until morning for three nights. Despite the thick snow on the ground, the buildings on the street seemed to shake.

In the middle of the third night we were awakened by an unusual loud and strange sound. We jumped out of our beds and ran to the four windows in our bed room. Looking down to the street we saw what seemed like buses, but instead of wheels they were gliding on skies and were propelled by propellers that were mounted to the tops of the roofs. The noise was that of an aeroplane from ten meters away.

Several dozens of such machines past by and we spent the rest of the night talking and admiring the Soviet war technology.

During that earl winter a few of the students-cohabitants of the dorms were expelled. It started when a government commission appeared one evening and started to investigate everyones what they called "social background". Not so much ours but our parents. For example: What was your parents occupation before the war? What are their holdings? How big is your house? Have you any relatives abroad? And so on.

After that investigation we were told to write home to get from the local authorities a statement of their "social background" and forward it to the director-manager of the dorms.

When my next came I already knew that to have been a Zionist was not advisable. All I told them was that my father was a Czarist soldier in the war,

was badly wounded and is an invalid. To their question if I have relatives abroad, for some unexplainable reason or sixth sense, the word "no" came from my mouth.

The bigger problem was to get the letter on social background from the authorities in Shershev. My father went to that office not expecting miracles. Entering the main room, where a few secretaries were sitting, each at his own desk, he noticed a familiar face. It was a local farmer's son who before the war used to make violins in his spare time. When I, at age ten, began to learn to play violin, my father bought from him a violin, paying him the full price without arguing. My father went straight to him. After telling him what he came for, the secretary, a bright young man who apparently remembered the fact that my father paid him his asking price for the violin, wanted to reciprocate . He wrote as my father asked, it read as follows: Moysey (Russian for Moishe) Kantorowicz, is the son of Issak who has no home (not mentioning the fact that it was nationalized) who used to receive a wars invalid pension.

I could not have dreamed of a better recommendation from that slip of paper. When I faced the commission for the second time, I was asked again all sorts of questions, mostly the same as before. Suddenly, one asked me if I have family or relative in the United States. To my mind came my two uncles there Uncle Shoime with his family as well as my Uncle Pesah (Philip) and his family. Besides hem I had an aunt, the wife of my deceased Uncle Lippa with her son Irving. At that time, I did not realized how much my answer depended on my remaining in the dorms. Remembering the answer during the first interview, without hesitation, I said "no."

Later, when the commission concluded their work, and the rejected were gone, we started to tell each other how some succeeded in obtaining a favorable report from the authorities. Most of them got it by bribery, which was so prevalent in the Soviet Union.

In the beginning of December I found out that the department of education which was situated on Unje Lubelskie, the most beautiful and modern street in Brest-Litowsk, was accepting applications for entry into the teachers seminary, but the day before was the last day to apply. I called them on the phone and was told that if I can bring in my application before five o'clock that day , they will accept it. I set out immediately and handed in my application before closing time. Being told there that those with better qualifications have a greater chance of being accepted.

I was not sure if I wanted to change my future profession from a technician to a teacher, but I wanted to have the opportunity of choice.

When I left that office that wintery evening, I felt so delighted, so happy, that now sixty years later, I find it difficult to describe. I do not know even why I suddenly experienced so much joy. The street lights shone brighter with a holiday sparkle. Everything around me seemed cheerful, simple glorious, all because they took my application, which was far from being accepted into the seminar. Is it because I did not expect much from anybody? Is it because I am grateful for even a little kindness or is it that it does not take much to make me happy?

Nothing came from that application anyway and I remained where I was. Actually I settled down quite comfortably. From the seventeen boys in our room , my closest friend became a boy from Molczadz, near Grodno, by the name of Menachem Borejszy. His shtetl not bigger then mine, gave usmany subjects for conversation and comparison of character and characteristics of its inhabitants. He was a year or two older than I. His father having lost his flour mill to the new government gave both of us reason to dislike the Bolshevics. Like many others, his father too had to resort to bribery in order to get a favorable note from the local authorities regarding his social background. Among others were two boys from Volynia. Both by the name of Shalom Wiess, they were cousins.

Not all was going smoothly among us seventeen boys in our bedroom. There were disagreements, all because of the windows. There were four of them. Those of us who slept near the two ovens were complaining that it is too hot in the room and wanted the windows to stay open. On the other end those whose beds were ear the open windows were freezing in that coldest winter in my memory. I could not blame them. Fortunately my bed was in the middle of a row of beds along a wall and was not effected.

Shortly before New Year 1940, my father visited Brest-Litowsk and I decided to go with him back to Shershev,as it was a day or two before the start of the winter vacation.

We got to the train many hours before the train was due to depart in order to get a seat. Despite our early arrival almost all the seats were taken. We got however, our two seats one next to the other on the long bench along the wall of the coach.

The time of departure came and went and the train was not moving. All that time more and more passengers kept on coming. Not finding seats, they sat on their suitcases or bundles. It got so crowded that it became impossible to get in or out of the coach but the train does not move.

And we sat there all that afternoon, all night and all the following day. Finally, late the second evening the train began to move. The first station out

of Brest-Litowsk was Zabinka, where the train stopped for some hours. Next station was Teweli, where it all repeated itself. In the morning, we reached Linowo-Oranczyce, our station where we got off.

We have covered a distance of barely one hundred kilometers by train and it took us two days and two nights. From there to Pruzany we had to take the narrow gadge train to cover twelve more kilometers. After waiting for two hours, the station master told us that the train has not left Pruzany on its return back.

Walking back and forth in and around the station, we suddenly came across a Shershev girl by the name of Ghitle Kwelman. As far as every one in Shershev knew, she left home a month earlier with the intention to cross the newly created border between the Soviet Union and Lithuania, in order to get to Wilno. For a rumor spread that from Wilno, now returned to Lithuania by the Bolshevics one could still get to the land of Israel. Appparently, she did not succeed in crossing the border. Not wanting her mother "Theme" and brother "Avreml" to know of her failure to get to Wilno with tears in her eyes, she begged us not to utter a word to anybody, not even her mother hat we saw her.

We kept that promise. My father up to his last breath in the gas chamber of Auschwitz and I until now, when I am writing it down on paper some sixty years later. One thing I am sure of, hat she never got to the land of Israel. Would she have, she would have found her sister Tzipara (Gitle) Tzemach-Kwelman in Kibbutz Shahar Agolan. She disappeared as suddenly as she appeared. We remained on the station, not knowing what to do. There was no other means of transportation. Being familiar with the regularity of Soviet transportation, we decided to start on foot, with the hope that a Soviet big shot or a Soviet military vehicle will pick us up on the way. The tw small suitcases were not heavy, so we set out.

Before we covered half a kilometer we realized that there won't be a lift, the snow was too deep for the unploughed road for any vehicle to pass. Yet stubbornly we continued on that twelve kilometer track until we got to Pruzany. Getting there before dark we had a problem finding a place to sleep over. My father's brother, Uncle Joshua, was driven out of his house by the Bolshevics and rented a small apartment barely big enough for him and his family. My Aunt Sheindl, my father's sister, and her husband Leibl afraid they too will lose their house took in a prestigious Soviet military brain surgeon receding to him and family the bigger part of the house. It happened that in a nearby lane called Rezki lived two brothers, Nathan and David Kabizecki with their mother. They moved from a village a couple years

earlier. Their oldest brother, Yaakov Meir, was married to my Aunt Esther-Liba Auerbach's sister, Sarah. That made us sort of related by marriage and we spent the night there. Next day we finally arrived in Shershev.

Who could have imagined that four months after the arrival of the Bolshevics it would have taken three days to cover a distance of just over one hundred kilometers.

I will admit that it has improved by the time the winter was over.

It was so good to be back home. True, not our house, but still grandparents house. To be with my mother, to know and feel, her love, her affection and tenderness. Knowing how difficult it was for her to overcome the recent shock of losing our house. It must have been difficult to try to disguise her feelings, in front of us and to give up wholly and earnestly her time and attention to us children. My sister, Sheva, too came for the vacations home from Pruzany where she was studying and shared her experiences with our mother.

With my grandparents lived their son Eli(Eliyahu) who had recently returned from the short Polish German war and a couple of months German prisoner of war camp. Now had the opportunity to listen to his experiences during that time.

This is what he told me: A few days before the start of the war, they knew already that war is inevitable. They dug in deeper fortifying their trenches with logs. Friday at about three in the morning, the German artillery started to bombard them. Hs battery with the four light cannons immediately answered. It did not take them long to realize that their shooting back was no more than a joke in comparison to the German fire. While they were shooting with light artillery the Germans were firing with one hundred and fifty five millimeter shells and for each shell they fired, the Germans answered with ten.

Still this artillery exchange went on for three days and nights. On the thrid night, single soldiers began to appear from the direction of the front. They were ordered by the artillery officers to go back to the front. Instead, more and more began to appear. They too were ordered to go back to the front, but they categorically refused claiming that there is no more front. As if to confirm their claim an order came for the artillery men to put on the bayonet on the rifles and get ready for an expected German infantry attack, as their own infantry in front of them is no more.

It is one thing to find yourself behind the front and fire at an unseen enemy, and something else to find yourself in the dark in the middle of a forest to try to make out an invisible enemy. A couple of hours later, they

were ordered to get the cannons out, take as much ammunition as they can and withdraw.

Once the withdrawal started there was no stopping. It became a race between them and the Germans to see who can get first to Warsaw. On the way they were constantly exposed to German bombardment from the air and artillery. The soldiers who looked after the draw horses used to get on them from time to time, but my uncle Eli had only a bicycle. Others dragged along on foot. During the two weeks of retreat they had no rest and every soldier was tired to the extent that my uncle fell asleep a couple of times on his bicycle and fell off. On the way some of their equipment and supply was destroyed or lost, they also lost many of the horses to the constant bombardment.

They reached Warsaw on September 15 with two of their four cannons and they immediately dug in. Two days later the Nazi hordes closed the circle around Warsaw in an iron trap.

Much has been written about the siege of Warsaw. I want here to note just one episode of my uncle's experience during that time. Their remaining two artillery pieces were in one hole standing side by side. In a nearby hole were their shells. However, in the hole with the cannons they kept several shells handy. During a cannonade, a German shell exploded in the hole with the two cannons, wounding four soldiers and setting the few shells ablaze. Instinctively the other soldiers jumped out of the hole covering themselves behind the piles of earth around it, leaving to themselves the four wounded and unable to move comrades. They all heard their cries for help but nobody dared to get to them for fear that the other shell will explode any second.

It was my uncle Eli who braved hat challenge jumping in and coming out with one wounded soldier, repeating it three more times. The fire did not set up the expected explosion but burned itself out. His commanding officer shook my uncle Eli's hand and promised him a medal for bravery at a more acceptable time, which never came.

I will not describe the events that took place in the besieged city of Warsaw in the next dozen days, I will rather continue with its surrender.

On the 28th of September in the morning came an order to discard their weapons. Some made it useless and some left it intact. Some of the operational weapons was appropriated by the Polish citizenry, but the bulk jof the weapons fell into the German hands intact. They marched out of the city and were immediately surrounded by German soldiers who broke them up in smaller groups. His group consisting of several thousand men, after a long march, were led into a large building and a high fence around it. They

were locked inside, guarded by Germans all around. They used to get a piece of bread with tea in the morning, a bowl of soup at noon and tea at night. The place was near the city of Minsk-Mazowiecki, about fifty kilometers east of Warsaw.

The several thousand soldiers were a collection of men from all over Poland, with many from the eastern parts, a number from our parts of Poland. Almost daily some were taken away and replaced by others. It began to look like the Germans were converting this camp into a prisoner of war camp for eastern Poland's citizens. My uncle found among them even Jewish young men from Shershev, like his childhood friend Leibl Neibrif, others were Gotl Weiner, Rafael Lewkowicz, David Kabizecki, Leizer Sznajder, and others. It was rumored in that camp the Germans were gathering the eastern Polish citizens, now under the Bolshevics to use as a bargaining chip with the Soviets.

Sometime in November, the date I do not remember, the Germans locked them up in trains cars, drove them to the newly created German Polish border at Brest-Litowsk, let them out and told them to march to Brest-Litowsk a few kilometers away.

At the border the Bolshevics were waiting for the, took them by trucks into the city and into the bath house. Their disappointment was great when they were told to put on their old and lice infested underwear and their own dirty worn and torn uniforms. They did give them something to eat and a train ticket to go home.

This much I still remember from my uncle Eli's experience which he tod me some sixty years ago.

During that winter vacation some terrible sickness was going around. The Soviets called it "Mennenghit". (menningitis) A plague none of us had ever heard of before. The most suseptible to that sickness were children and young children people. Those who caught it succumbed to it.

This sickness, the unusually cold winter and the shortage of all kinds of commodities, which was justifiable, was blamed on the Bolshevics.

They in turn felt offended by those accusations. A rumor spread that drinking vodka and smoking is a good remedy and protection against that sickness. We boys, jokingly, used to add playing cards. That must have been the only time that I tried seriously to smoke. People soon realized that it is no more than superstition. I remained a non smoker.

For an unknown and explainable reason, that sickness was more prevalent among the non Jewish population. In middle of that winter, the epidemic subsided. Maybe because of severe cold.

There were in Shershev a few Jewish refugee families that came to stay with relatives. During the round up of refugees in Brest-Litowsk, those families in Shershev as well as in the nearby Pruzany were rounded up too and sent to Siberia. Over winter a few local families were exiled to Siberia. One of hem a Jewish family that was sent away for the sins of their oldest son, who supposedly collaborated with the previous Polish government. Among the Christian families was the former mayor of the shtetl Szlykiewicz, who used to alternate with my grandfather as mayor of the shtetl every second year. They too were expecting every day for the Soviet secret police to come for them. People rumored that the only reason they did not was because of their age, both were in the seventies and I doubt that they would have survived the trip. Apparently the Bolshevic saw it this way too and did not want to trouble. Their space in a wagon could be taken up by a younger family who presented a much greater danger to the Soviet Union than my grandparents.

As it turned out the Soviets did that Jewish family a favor. They survived avoiding the holocaust.

The fear among every one, Jew or non Jew was greater. All it took is a denouncement by anyone an one became a prospective candidate for one way ticket to Siberia. We had to be careful with criticism or remarks regarding government or its leaders.

One woman succeeded in getting out of the Soviet trap. That woman was Sonia Pinski-Shemesh about whom I wrote much earlier. She came to Shershev in early summer 1939 with a one and a half year old daughter to visit her parents Joshua and Bluma Pinski. In her four years in then Palestine, she became a Palestinian citizen and travelled on such a passport, which the Bolshevis honored and let her out. By it saving her and her daughter's lives.

Before her departure the Soviet secret police warned her not to tell anybody when she is leaving nor to take leave from anybody. She knew already to follow their advice and said good bye only to her parents and her sister Ryaha and family. When I came home for the New year 1940, she was already in Palestine (Israel).

It is from her that we in Shershev found out in 1940, that the great Zionist leader Zabot
insky died, when her sister Ryaha received from her a letter in which among other safe and petty talk, she wrote the following words: our Velvel died. Velvel was the Yiddish first name Zabotinsky. We knew whom she meant.

All Jewish organizations were disbanded or stopped functioning. The Jewish community bank was nationalized, even such a charitable and beneficial institution as "Linat Atzedek" whose function it was for volunteers to sit with a sick person at night so that the family can get a nights rest was suspect and prohibited. The Yiddish library in which a generation of young Jewish boys and girls labored so hard to create and sustain was closed. The books disappeared. What happened to the Hebrew library in the Hebrew school one can imagine, as even the language was taboo.

Jewish life as such, with its benevolent and charitables, as well as political organizations ceased to exist. True, Jews spoke Yiddish in the street without fear, even less than before the war and learned Yiddish in the former Hebrew school. To some, the laws were difficult to adjust to. Like working on Shabbat (Saturday) and other holidays. It was something a Jew in Shershev never did before.

About the same time two more Jewish homes were nationalized. One Meir Yona Reitmans and the other Joseph Tuchmachers. In Meir Yona's house they opened a restaurant and in Tuchmacher's a bank.

The Bolshevics wante my uncle Reuven's house badly. Hoping to prevent it, my uncle took in a tenant, a Soviet family by the name of Bobrov. A couple with two teenage children. That Bobrov was sent to set up and manage the government business organization, the sole and only in the Soviet Union. Under the Bolshevics, Shershev became a district town where Bobrov was the town and district manager to be.

He got busy organizing a functioning unit made up of local talent namelyl: former business men. Living in my uncle's house, he met my father and offered him a job. The ancient so called "radd-kromen" (row of stores) was converted into a huge warehouse. The thick walls separating the individual stores were broken through forming one large single unit. One of those stores became the office of the warehouse, but the main office of that organization was situated in Isar Gychman's house which was nationalized for that purpose. Actually they were two separate houses under one roof belonging to the Gychman brothers. The other half belonging to the younger brother Fivell was converted into a restaurant. The two brothers were compelled to find their own living accomodations by moving in with somebody else. As in previous other cases, they too were not compensated for their homes.

This business organization to be more precise "providing or supply organization" had to its disposal two trucks that used to travel almost daily to Brest-Litowsk for its allotted quantity of merchandise.

They needed a representative of the organization to make sure that they are getting the full amount assigned to them, which by the way was never enough to satisfy the demand. If possible to try and get more if need be "on the quiet", that is, by bribery.

Besides the driver a couple of strong men used to come along as load hands. One of the drivers was a Jewish man by the name of Eli Neibrief and one of the load hands was a Jewish young man whom I mentioned many pages before as the young man who served in the Polish army with a Blimps detachment. Accepted despite his Jewishness because of his unusual strength, by the name of Noah Hochman.

My father was assigned to travel with them to fill the above position.

The Soviets started training people for the many new jobs being created. Like teachers, due to the many schools they opened in the villages, book keepers, tractor mechanics and operators and so on.

My uncle Eli signed up for a course of book keeping which opened in a shtetl Antopol. Being the only one to have graduated gymnasium among the participants, he graduated the two months course with the highest marks. Coming back home, the same Bobrov, my father's boss made my uncle the head book keeper.

During that same winter, that is winter of 1939-40, the Bolshevics set up other offices and organizations. For example, one whose task it was to buy up cattle, pigs and even poultry for the government from the farmers. Even pig and horse tail hair.

The last two articles and rugs used to be the occupation of a dozen or two Jews in Shershev who used to travel in the villages, trading in it with the farmers. A life of eternal poverty and outright hunger for them and their families.

Now it became a government organization in which they employed those poor Jews. If those poor Jews made under the Bolshevics a better living, I do not know. What I do know is that they did not work as hard. While before the war they used to leave home on Saturday night, returning on Thursday night or Friday morning, under the Soviets, they used to come home every night, sleeping in their own bed whatever it was, but better than in the farmer's barns five or six nights a weeks summers and winters.

What was also important was the fact that they used to get paid their wages regardless of the amount of business they did. The burden of earning their piece of bread literally their hand to mouth life style eased a bit.

Their problem was the same as everybody elses. Now how much they made, but what they could get for it and how at official and not a black market prices.

In this respect their job gave them an advantage. The government business organization sold their products and wares at government prices. To be able to do it they had to get the raw products at government prices too. But the farmers were not prepared to sell a cow for three hundred rubles, the price of half a dozen bottles of vodka on the black market. In order to entice the farmer or to "sweeten the pot" the village travellers used to bring the farmer to town, where that organization had their own warehouse with merchandise and where the farmer could exchange the value of the cow for items needed at government prices. At such an exchange or transaction the village traveler used to benefit something.

This form of exchange or business was applicable only to the newly acquired Soviet territories of Poland. In the Soviet Union proper, all former farmers were long before forces into collective farms that belonged to the government and the government ruled or bullied them as they pleased. It was only because the Soviet did not want to create a panic among the farmers in the beginning that they treated them with kid gloves.

As there was no regular delivery of good or a total cease on others, the trades man were left with no work. Having no choice they had to join the newly created "artels" (collective workshops).

While there was still some merchandise in shtetl that was in stores from before the war, it was among the population that snatch it from the stores at the price of a ruble per zloty, really for nothing. Some storekeepers managed to hide a bit of merchandise which they kept with friends and family for safe keeping, selling it on the quiet and living of the savings.

Those in grocery business were literally eating it away. The people that managed to buy or sell, I say grabbed yard goods or leather, particularly for shoe soles that became exceedingly expensive kept it for emergencies to sell it for exorbitant prices.

In general people restrained from dressing up, not to awaken envy among the easterners (Soviets) who out of jealousy used to refer to them as capitalists.

Over the winter some more easteners arrived from the Soviet Union. First they took over the more important positions in their offices and organizations. But when those jobs were filled they gladly accepted lesser positions. For them to come to the western provinces of Belaruss or Ukraina was coming to "America."

They associated mostly with their own and it seemed to me that they had an unwritten pact to help each other on the quiet. At least in small places where the artels (collective workshops) used to get the material (cloth) or the unobtainable leather to make boots for the easteners.

After the winter vacation I returned back to Brest-Litowsk where lfie continued on what it seemed to be an even course. All sorts of promises were made for the young generation, above all a bright future. At times and to an extend we did get carried away. But the moment I used to take a look at the reality, how carefully one has to step forwards. How uncertain and questionable every ones future is, I used to outright hate them.

I used to think of a year earlier, when I was sixteen under a re gime to which I felt bitter aversion, yet I did not have to weigh every word or remark which not only could get me expelled from school, but its ramifications and consequences could haunt me for the rest of my life.

Under the anti-semitic Polish rule not only could I not criticize the government amongst Jews but even among the general public. Now in the so called free Soviet Union one had to be careful not only among strangers, but even among your townspeople and even neighbors. While we young could at time permit ourselves to make a frivolous joke about the government, a grown up would not dare to.

What puzzled the Jewish populations, especially in the larger cities like Brest, Bialystok, Lwow and others was the arrest and sending to Siberia of the leadership of the "Bund" (Jewish socialist organization.) After all the "Bund" was an outmost socialist organization that even renounced any claim on the land of Israel. So what was their sin?

Quite a few years passed before the Jewish public or to be more precise, what was left of the Jewish public, understood the reason. But at that time it was a mystery. Admittedly, Zionist leaders were persecuted too, but not to the extent as of the "Bund".

Brest-Litowsk, being a major city had noticeably more and richer people, owners of bigger businesses and big homes or tenement houses that were by the Bolshevics nationalized, were unceremoniously sent to Siberia. Their possessions appropriated by the Bolshevics without any compensation.

For Pessach (Passover) I came home. It was not like the previous Passovers. Although at that time, the Soviets did not interfere in preparing for the holiday like in the later years, or maybe they did not want to show their iron fist. In any case, the Jewish housewives could get on with their preparing. There was no more Kosher vodka or wine. With difficulties my mother got some hops and honey. Staying for hours in line for sugar, my

mother made mead. As at that time the farmers were still independent chickens and eggs could be gotten. Some of the pre war butchers were still on the quiet. Butchering and selling meat, we had meat too for the holiday.

Everyone being now a government employee, was ordered to show up to work on the holidays. This too, a first for the Jewish in town. The only males that showed up in the synogogues were old men too old to work. A few, using all kinds of excuses came to work a bit later, managing to go to the synogogue before going to work. For the older men those were trying times.

During those vacations I found out that the government wanted badly my uncle Reuven's house. It just happened that it was on the border line of one hundred and thirteen square meters. A commission came and measured it over and over again as if trying to stretch it a little bit more. When my uncle received a letter from them to vacate the houses, he refused. Instead he took the government to court. The court in turn sent another commission which established that it was indeed on the border line and allowed him to keep it.

At that time none of us knew that the Bolshevics did not give up their attempt to get his house. They just changed the strategy. They set out on a more wicked and sinister route, that only the Soviets were able to conceive.

It was no secret anywhere on their newly acquired territories, that former merchants that succeeded in saving a bit of their merchandise were selling it on the quiet in order to get by, as they were branded capitalists, thus none eployable by the government. Not having any trade or profession, barred from most office jobs, they faced destitution. Thus they lived on whatever they managed to salvage from their own.

The little business, or selling off that they were conducting, was against the Soviet law. It was one in secrecy with trusted people. As it was called "Speculation."

The Bolshevics se tout to prosecute my uncle on the grounds of breaking the law, charging him with "speculation" which if found guilty, meant banishment to Siberia for him and his family.

They started quietly to watch him and his house. At the same time looking for potential witnesses. It did not matter if real or false. They were capable to force anyone to say what they wanted him or her to say. For the record, my uncle did sell something from time to time of whatever he managed to salvage of his merchandise in order to feed his family.

It took the Soviets a couple of months to get enough witnesses. Among them a militiaman. All this took place during the spring of 1940.

At the end of school year in the later part of June 1940, I returned home. So did my sister Sheva. At the same time from Pruzany came two of my friends Kalman Kalbkoif and Moishe Gelman. They started to attend the Hebrew gymnasium before the war. The Soviets converted it into a so called "Diesitioletka", (ten year school,) where Yiddish was introduced instead of the previous Hebrew and Russian instead of Polish.

My youngest Sister, Liba was then promoted to grade two, the second youngest Sonia, who was two years older, promoted into grade four, two grades higher above Liba and my brother Liova (Leibl) two years older than Sonia still two grades higher.

My close friend Leizer Rotenberg, graduated from the Ort school in Brest-Litowsk in 1939 and during the winter 1939-40 took a tractor driving and maintenance course. Shortly after, he got a job in the newly created and first "colkhoze", (collective farm,) in our area, in the village of Krinica, (not to confuse with Krinica in the mountains,) coming home very Sunday. Sometime even to spend a night during the week as it was a distance of only nine kilometers.

There were no more young idlers in shtetl. For two reasons: First, was the fact that a family could use any financial help there was available, regardless of how small the pay was and even with the almost worthless rubles, secondly, the Easterers, the Soviet newcomers, looked askance on young men walking around without work, repeating often one of the well known paragraphs of the Soviet constitution " the one that doesn't work, doesn't eat."

With my father's intervention, I got a job for the vacation time with the same organization in which my father and uncle Eli worked. The provision organization. My work consisted of putting together the merchandise that used to arrive almost daily and divide it up in six different portions, according to the population of each group of villages. Each village group consisted of about twenty villages with a retail store in each village. Each store had a manager and assistant. Both were government employees. In this way the government created jobs which did not exist before. That there was nothing to sell did not bother the employees, they got paid regardless. Each village group had a manager and assistant as well as a book keeper, thus creating new government positions unnecessary. A top heavy bureaucracy that attached itself to the body of the masses like leaches.

The above mentioned village, group managers used to come a couple or few time a week with several horse and buggies to pick up their allotment of

merchandise that used to arrive with the organization trucks from Brest-Litowsk.

Bulk merchandise used to come direct from the Soviet Union by car load to the station Oranczyce-Linovo like salt, sugar, kerosin, vodka, cement, bricks, tiles and others. When such shipments used to arrive, entirevillagers with their horses and buggies used to be sent out to the rail way stations to bring it in.

Even though some items used to arrive in huge quantities, the demand never ceased, even on items like bricks, tiles and cement. Although the building of houses stopped, people kept on buying whatever there was for sale.

The consumption had increased to be precise too. For example, vodka was hardly used or drunk by Jews. Jews were not drinkers. If a Jew used to take a small drink at a celebration, he used to be considered a drinker. In contrast, at a Christian wedding, every one got drunk. Another example, will be sugar. Jews used to use a fair amount of it, while Christian farmers in shtetl used very little. In the villages, none at all.

But with the arrival of the Bolshevics, things had changed. Not only did the Christian population start using sugar, but on a large scale and some Jews started quietly to take a drink too.

Candy was a treat for children and only in the better of families. During the Bolshevic era, it became accessible to all as it was sold at government prices. Even though it used to arrive by the full car loads, enough to last for years in our district in the pre war times, it was sold in a few hours. Disappear, not to be seen for months.

Among my co-workers was a local young man by five years my senior, Shalom Bernsztein, with whom I became good friends. Our work was physically demanding. The bulk merchandise used to be sent to their destinations upon arrival, but the more valuable items was in part distributed and in part held back. There was a political reason for it; there always was a shortage of things and the Easteners, the big shots, were embarrassed to stand in line for anything, it would have been below their dignity. Besides, the amount being distributed to each customer would not be enough for them. So by an unwritten law and against the Bolshevic dogma, they used to receive their supplies from the main storehouse.

The manager of the warehouse, my immediate superior, himself an Easterner, by the name of Pietrukiewicz hailed from Malecz. A small shtetl thirty kilometers from Shershev, somehow turned up on the Bolshevic side during the first world war and in 1939 returned with the Easterners to his

native region. He made sure that those Soviet big shots in shtetl have whatever they needed. It is reasonable to assume that he did not do it without a wink from higher authorities. Yet it was done in such a manner as to appear that those big shots knew nothing of it.

It was part of my job to bring those items to their living quarters giving it to their wives white the men were at work in their offices. Among those officials were the first secretary of the party, the judge, the chief of the militia (police), the chief of N.K.V.D. (secret police), the city major who lived in our house and a few others.

A large assortment of other wares used to arrive in that warehouses. A lot of it already made in Bialystok, manufactured under the Soviet supervision and standard. Like crockery, dishes, utensils, notions, footwear with rubber soles (leather was unavailable), ready made clothes, particularly fleece underwear, gloves, hats, mitts, even dresses and men's suits. However, it was of such poor quality that would it have been before the war, it would have never left the store shelves. Still, people used to line up in front of he government stores from early morning. In cases of sugar, vodka, sausage, chocolate and such, people used to line up in the evening, spending the bitter cold nights outside in order to assure an early access to the store and a chance of buying one of the desired but limited articles.

For a year after the arrival of the Bolshevics, shipments continued to arrive of candy from Wilno, wrapped in the pre war wrapping papoer which carried a "Menorah" (a seven branch candelabrum, a Jewish emblem) as well as the name of the firm "Menorah". I used to think of the Jewish owner or owners of that candy factory. How the Bolshevics deprived them of their lives labour, in return awarded them and their families with one way tickets in a cattle car to Siberia.

From time to time with the arriving shipments of merchandise, something good and rare used to come; items unseen in the Soviet Union, like sewing machines, real fur coats, electric kettles, aluminum pots, even good caucasian wine or even caviar. It used to arrive in small quantities and the public never got to see it nor to know of its arrival. The Eastern bigshots quietly used to get a hold of it. In fact, I had to bring it home to some of them.

This too had to be done on the quiet that nobody should know, not even the big shots themselves. I had to deal with their wives so that in case that it should become exposed, they, the big shots, would deny any knowledge of it.

Even after breaking this law it used to remain for the book and stock keepers of the warehouse, the job of making legitimate this transaction. Let

me explain: all merchandise used to arrive with the explicit instructions to sell it in the retail (government) stores. We, in the main warehouse had no right to sell it, period. To protect ourselves, we used to issue it on an invoice to a store. The store manager used to sign for it, but instead of receiving the merchandise he received rubles for the official value of the items.

Those big shots were only too glad to pay for it and for good reason. For example; the official price of a fur coat was four hundred rubles, none obtainable in a store as they used to find their way to the black market and sold for ten thousand rubles or more. The same was applicable for sewing machines, electric utensil and other rare item in the Soviet Union. Is it surprising that they were so anxious to get hold of it?

Items like vodka, in small quantities used to be held back from the public for exactly the same reason..

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When one of those big shots was desperate for a drink, he often used to come into the warehouse using all kinds of excuses to start a conversation which eventually used to lead to the topic of vodka, at which time he would ask if we haven't got a bottle stuck somewhere. At times, unable to get rid off him, the manager would sell him one. A lot depended on who the person was and his position in the establishment. I recall that when the chief of the militia once came in for vodka, the manager did not dare to say there is none. Instead, he asked him how many bottle would he like.

The desired amount I packed in an empty nails box, hammering the cover down to appear unopened, I took it outside. There, in front of passerbys I called out to him aloud: comrade chief, where shall I take the nails to? He answered with the same loud voice, take it to the militia headquarters. Then as if he thought of something he added; you know what. I have to go later to the station, take it to my house and I will take it from there to the station myself.

That was one of the faces of the many faces of life in the Soviet Union.

Despite the superficial appearance of comradship among the Easteners (Soviets) that lived in Shershev, there was an undercurrent of jealousy among them, especially among the wives of the higher officials who envied each other for the things their husbands provided them with.

They came to us with nothing or with very little and in a short time they started to go out in the street in new dresses, suits and coats. They all knew

that they got it in the warehouse and pressured their husbands to provide more and better things.

My job was one of the best once could have in shtetl. After all, all the merchandise allocated for Shershev and its vicinity passed through our hands unavoidably we benefited from it too. We took the lessons from the big shots, it was they who taught us When scarce merchandise used to arrive, (and what was not scarce?), we, the few of us workers, used to write out invoices to the retail store and pay with rubles taking the merchandise home.

This was done in strict secrecy and within reason. Still we manager to bring home more than we could use. When we did have more than needed, m parents used to sell it. This too had to be done in strict secrecy. My parents had a trusted middleman by the name of Ghedalia Chydrick who used to come and buy it up, selling it to other trusted clients. Who his customers were, my parents never asked nor did he volunteer to say.

The entire affair had to be done in secrecy, for would the militia have any suspicion, all they had to do was to stop me on my way home from work. Chances were that they would find something on me. A package of cigarettes or a piece of soap would be enough to send me to Siberia. Even the middlemans coming and going, was not doing it during daylight hours, so was the fear that one of his customers should not be put up by the militia.

But the entire life under Soviet rule was steeped in fear. Everybody jhad to improvise, as the saying then was that "Uncle Stalin give enough to exist one week of the month, for the other three weeks one has to provide by himself."

Taking in consideration those wages in those days, one had to improvise or literally starve.

To say that the government, the militia and the secret police did not know what is going on would be naïve. On one hand, they themselves benefited from it, on the other, I suspect that they kept a file on each person, setting down in writing everybodys offenses in order to be able later to blackmail them into cooperating with them.

They began to appear on the newly acquired Soviet territories. What caused them to do so is not clear. It could be idealism, maybe for pay, show ones loyalty in order to get promoted or outright fear of reprisal by the secret police, namely to be sent to Siberia.

In the middle of that summer vacation coming home after work, I found my parents upset. They told me that a couple hours earlier, a member of the militia came to us telling them to send me to their headquarters when I got back from work.

That supper none of us enjoyed. As soon as we finished I got up to go to the militia. My parents looked at me with apprehension, not knowing what they want of me or if they will let me go home.

At six thirty I was there reporting to the one on duty. He pointed at a row of chairs and told me to sit down. There were a couple of men sitting in that waiting room. Some more kept coming. All were called in at intervals to another room coming out and leaving and I am still sitting.

All kinds of thoughts were going through my head. None f them good. Why am I here? If they want to arrest me, why don't they? Time passes by ever so slowly. It is already nine o'clock, ten and eleven. The last two hours I am all by myself.

Shortly before midnight, I was called into the chief's office. He sat behind a large desk which was covered with a loud red table cloth that within minutes started to irritate my eyes. The first thought that came into my mind was the question: What is the matter with those people. Don't they sleep at night? They dragged my father out of bed well after midnight a year ago to inform him that he will get his vodka back and me they keep here until midnight for G-d knows what. How do they keep it up?

After making sure that I am the one they want and that my immediate superior is Pierukiewcz and that his superior is Bobrov, he started asking me about my job, what it consists of, what is the procedure in the warehouse and so on. At the time they seemed innocent and insignificant questions. But when he asked me about those not connected with our work people that come into the warehouse, I became alert and careful with my answers.

After asking me a few more questions which apparently did not satisfy him, he said: What happened to the aluminum casseroles that arrived in the warehouse? For a moment I got stunned by such a direct question. IN total only four aluminum casseroles arrived, which did not see the light of day as they were "appropriated" by the Easteners of higher rank. The fact that we left them have it was against the law, but what is worse was the fact that it was taken by officials of high status and position, embers of the Bolshevic party, put them and the party in a bad light.

Sitting there opposite him and looking straight into his gray green eyes, I felt like saying: Don't you know that your friends and comrades, the so called liberator (as they liked to be called), have taken them. But I did not dare. At that very moment I decided to claim ignorance. He continued with the questions about other goods and hard to get items. I was waiting for him to ask about the fur coats of which one I personally took to his home handing it to his wife, but he knew better, fearing that I might answer on that one.

Still he continued to ask questions to which I answered "I don't know." He got so agitated that he said: you know that your "Social background" is not a good one, hinting of the fact that our house was nationalized (taken away), and that my father was a merchant and my grandfather, the mayor. (all of them unforgiven sins) and he continued regardless of the fact that our constitution says that a father is not responsible for his son nor is the son responsible for his father, the reality is different. (hinting that not only I but our entire family might be sent to Siberia). It will be much better for you and your family if you will cooperate with us.

For the hundreth time I repeated to him the same words that I don't know what he is talking about, that I leave work at five leaving the others in the warehouse and have no idea what takes place after I am gone. This did not deter him from continuing. This is what we want you to do: keep your eyes open at work, see what is taking place, quietly mark all transactions on a piece of paper, one of my assistance will come in supposedly to look around and you will slip that piece of paper to him. This way you will not have to come to the militia station and won't be suspect by anyone at work.

My response was that I have nothing to write down as I know nothing. He repeated his words again and again and then said: now go home and do what I say.

I got home after two in the morning, my parents were waiting up not knowing what happened to me. I told them exactly what transpired in the last eight hours and emphasized what the chief was asking of me.

My mother, not giving my father time to digest what I have just said, turned to me, emphasizing every word: Moishele remember, never be an informer, no matter what they will do to you or to us. Let them even send us all to Siberia but an informer never be.

Those sacred words from my mother still ring in my ears. They were and still are my guide and moral motivator through all the years of my life.

As the chief has said, a week later one of his assistants came into the warehouse. I knew him, as he too was one of those that used to come in to try and benefit from his position. This time however, he did not ask for anything. Just walked about looking around passing by me several times. I am sure the others were wondering what he came for, but I knew and did not pay attention. After about ten minutes he left.

A week later he was back again. This time too he left empty handed.

Some days later an ordinary militia man comes into the warehouse and out of the blue and starts to ask everyone for their passports. At that time all residents of the cities and towns had to have passports. Only villagers had

none except those that had to travel to the city. They were required to have their passports on them. It just happened that there were some villagers in the warehouse that came for their allotment of merchandise. It turned out that not only they but even all the workers with me had their passports except me. I never felt that I had the need to carry my passport on me. When the militia man got to me, I, in all honesty told him that mine was at home. In such a case, said the militia man, when you go home for lunch, bring your passport for we have to see yours too.

It all looked reasonable and straight forward, as he checked all of the ones their, to want to see mine too.

At lunch I took my passport and went to the headquarter of the militia. I was directed to the passport department where I was received by no less ta person than the chief of the department. Sitting me down in front of him in his private office, divided by his desk, he looked at me and asked: well, you still do not know what happened to the aluminum casseroles? I was amused at the fact that four casseroles can stir up such a fuss that they mustered the entire militia force consisting o half a dozen departments, each with its chief and a dozen or so subordinates, together there were in Shershev somewhere between sixty and seventy men. To count the secret security (N.K.V.D) they were together close to one hundred men. Taking in consideration that the Bolshevics had a militia man in every village. There were another one hundred and twenty five men in our area, which makes it over two hundred security men in our district. This compared with the five policemen that were in Shershev before the war, covering the same area. Is it than a wonder that people were suffocating under such a regime.

My decision was made on the night of my earlier visit to the chief of the militia and the support of my mother. Now I knew that my parents are willing to by me no matter what. Without hesitation I answered him "no:". The chief said: give me your passport. Opening it to the appropriate page, he wrote something in it, giving it back to me he said: now you can go. Outside I looked in it. There in clear letters was written: the passport is issued according to paragraph eleven of the constitution by law such and such.

This paragraph was known in the Soviet Union. It meant that the bearer of the passport is not a trustworthy person (according to Soviet law(but must submit to certain restrictions. Among those restrictions was one that prohibit the bearer to enter a seven kilometer wide zone along the border.

As Brest-Litowsk was within that zone, I could not return there, thus the end of my education.

A short time later my father too was called to the passport department of the militia where they wrote in the same couple lines as in mine. Thus preventing him from entering Brest-Litowsk causing him to lose his job. Fortunately, he found a job as book keeper with the shoe makers "artel" (communal workshop) whose chairman was a shoe maker by the name of Itshe Rubin who lived on Chazer-Ghesl (lane).

My top boss, the manager of the entire business organization Bobrov, himself a big shot and party member, who lived in my uncle Reuven's house, was under constant pressure from the party to get rid of the former merchands that worked for him. He in a sense felt persecuted, knowing that the Bolshevics are trying to take away my Uncle's house. He felt safe in my uncle's house to make a critical but harmless remark against the Bolshevics from time to time. Still he was very careful not to overstep the line.

However, his wife and my Aunt Chashkah got along very well and trusted each other. She used to confide to my aunt events that took place at the party meetings of which her husband was not supposed to tell her, his wife.

It was from her that we found out that the party is putting pressure on her husband to fire my father. When he told them that he can not get along without him, they asked the militia to write in may father's passport the paragraph eleven. A second time she told my aunt that they are demanding of him to fire my father's youngest brother, Eli, from his position as main book keeper. He maintained that he had nobody to replace him with.

On one bright day in walks a young but already fat man with the hands of a lumberjack with a pock marked face that used to be seen on mayn Easteners. Apparently small pox had not been fully eradicated at that time in the Soviet Union, especially in the rural areas. He came to replace my uncle Eli, that is to take his job.

However, the top boss, Bobrov, was no fool. He was only to well acquainted with the Soviet system of mass producing thousands of experts overnight. He did not fire my uncle. Just told him to move over to the next desk vacating his for the newcomer.

It did not take long for Bobrov and all the others in the main office to realize that the new expert did not know from his right to his left as far as book keeping goes. Still the new man retained his title but the main work was done by my uncle.

A week or two later, Bobrov was called to a meeting of the party for a tongue lashing as to why he did not dismiss my uncle. Here Bobrov had not only had a good excuse but turned the tables on them, his accusers. You

approached me for employing that Kantorowicz and went to the trouble of bringing a main book keeper from far in the Soviet Union. Now lookwhat they sent me in. A total ignoramus who has no inkling of what a book keeper is all about. If not for that Kantorowicz I would have to close the entire office.

Apparently his argument struck home. They never again mentioned to him my uncle's name.

The Bolshevics were not finished with the Kantorowiczes yet. The stopping me from going to school was not satisfactory for them yet. There was a score to settle with me. They wanted to remove me from one of the best jobs in town and maybe one that would cooperate with them, simply an informer.

I found out about it later. It happened this way: one day at work my supervisor Pietrukiewicz tells me to go deeper in the warehouse to get him something. As I pass from one department to the next I notice a large roll of bank notes on the floor.

Automatically, I picked it up and turned around to go with it to my boss Pietrukiewic. The moment I turned around I see Pietrukiewicz coming towards me. In all my innocence I stretch out my hand with the money asking him if it is his. Yes, he says and without uttering another word he puts it into his pocket.

A time later I found out that he too was under pressure to get rid of me. He refused claiming that as there is always valuable items in the warehouse he must have complete confidence in the workers. Having tested me several times he has full trust in me and can not let me go. They gave in.

Still, they carried a grudge against my uncle Reuven for putting up a fight for his house. We knew almost everything they were trying to do in order to make an open and shut case against him. After all, Shershev was a small shtetl. Good friends used to come to him or us and tell how the militia is trying to talk them into becoming witnesses against him.

We too did not stand idly by. First of all, my uncle had to prove that he does not live by being a speculator (a Soviet term for doing business) but is working. Hard physical labour was more "purifying" than office work according to Bolshevic dogma. So my uncle started working at building. We also started to look for willing witnesses to vouch for his honest laboriousness. We, that is all our Kantorowicz clan knew that our adversary, the government, is a formidable one and people were not eager to line up against them. Yet somehow my aunt managed to get through someone to the local judge. Promising him a leather coat, hat and boots as well as a fur coat

for his wife. (the above items no amount of rubles could buy). He, the judge, let know that proving my uncle will get a particular lawyer from Moscow (whose name he supplied) will try to give a verdict of sorts but no jail term.

At the trial the militia had some twenty witnesses against my uncle. They all testified that they bought from him goods after he closed out his store. The dozen or so witnesses on my uncle's side testified about his decency, modesty, and such. The credit however has to go to the lawyer, who appealed to the judge saying: What is his crime, that he sold his own merchandise? Then with a very loud voice he cried out to the judge in front of the public, but what was more important, he addressed it to the many militia and secret security (N.K.V.D.) men saying: Comrad judge, would you sentence a year old child to jail for eating candy? They have lived under our laws only for a year, do you expect them to know all our rules. They are like one year old children. He had a few more hard hitting arguements that I do not remember any more, but which succeeded in rediculing the entire case. It was obvious that despite the huge amount of work that the militia put into this case, the big city lawyer made a laughing stock out of them.

The judge seeing the superiority of the lawyer and the embarrassment of the prosecutor took advantage of the moment and pronounced the verdict. A two thousand ruble fine, at that time it represented four months average pay.

The joy of our family did not last long. The relentless prosecutor appealed the case to a higher court in Pruzany.

It took two months for the process to begin, during which time the militia did not do anything, while we tried to minimize the damage done by the witnesses for the prosecution at the first trial.

My parents attended the second process in Pruzany. The number of witnesses against my uncle had dropped to half and some had changed their story in favor of my uncle. The militia man that was the most important witness against my uncle was in between the two trials drafted into the army and unavailable at this one. But the most important thing in favor of my uncle was the telephone call that the judge in Shershev made to the judge in Pruzany inquiring about the process. It was enough of a hint for the presiding judge in Pruzany to understand that the Shershev judge was interested in the case and to understand in whose favor.

The judge in Pruzany, not being under pressure from the local authorities nor from the authorities in Shershev, who could not apply it even if they wanted it, felt free to pass a just verdict. Consequently, he declared that as the prosecution could not prove my uncle's guilt in breaking any law, he is

innocent and does not have to pay even the fine of two thousand rubles imposed on him in Shershev.

Our entire family felt relief until we found out that the local prosecutor had appealed the verdict to still a higher court in Minsk. There it seems the case got stuck among other court cases, where it remained from the falll of 1940 until the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22/41 when everything turned to dust and ashes. But at that time our extended family especially my uncle Reuven and his family continued to live under the Bolshevics as if our heads were under the guillotine ready to fall at any time.

Half way between Pruzany and the rail way station Oranczyce Linove were military baraks yet from the Polish times. The Red Army took it over extending it considerably, replacing the Polish cavalry with tanks and tractor powered artillery. From the barracks it turned into a so called military town, where a large number of civilians ere employed. My uncle Reuven found employment there away from the eyes of his prosecutors.

The distance from Shershev to those barracks was some twenty five kilometers. My uncle used to come home after work only when he could get a ride with a military vehicle and to be sure to have a ride back early in the morning before the day started.

There was a law which was called "Proghool" meaning to shirk from work. Saying that if one misses or comes late to work by twenty minutes, one loses twenty five percent of ones wages for the next six months. A repeater gets six months in jail.

Under such regiment, my uncle did not dare to be late to work, and neither did anybody else.

Is some one had sometimes dreamed sweet dreams about Bolsheivism they soon evaporated. The Jewish tradesmen and artisans who used to work before the war from early morning to late at night to eke out an austere livelihood might have dreamed about the Soviet Union. They too were disappointed with the reality. True, officially they worked only eight hours in the collective workshops, but the saying that "Uncle Stalin's monthly pay last for one week, the other three one has to manage on ones own" was applicable to them too. They had to work evenings at home or in the collective workshops on the quiet, under the counter so to say, using when possible the workshops material supplied by the government thus risking jail.

The varieties of bread, rolls and other baked items from before the war disappeared. All that was available was one sort of bread that looked white and tasted like clay. This bread, weighting four kilograms each, was baked in pans deliberately large and half baked so that the water in it should not

evaporate, therefore getting out more bread than it was supposed to from the amount of flour they used to receive. The extra bread used to be sold "under the table" by the workers in the bakery and divided among themselves.

The same thing used to take place in all other small enterprises that the Bolshevics set up and managed, like pop factories, soap and others. They employed local artisans and workers.

If the public could have gotten whatever they needed at government prices, the wages could have seen them through the month till the next pay cheque. As there was a chronic shortage of even the most elementary articles like soap, sugar and alike, not to mention apparel, clothing, and footwear, the only place to get it was on the black market.

As a result the government had driven all small business transactions underground, where prices were tenfold the official rate. Unable to make ends meet, people resorted to cheating and outright stealing from the government creating a nation of cheaters. To adds to it they succeeded in turning sympathizers into enemies.

The farmers, whose most precious possession was their land, were being "encouraged" to join the collective farms, which meant to give up their land and cattle, an unfathomable tragedy.

The farmers opposed it with all their might. Deep inside they knew that it is a loosing battle and everyday was for them a struggle. Most of them succeeded in holding out the two years under the Bolshevics and retained their land.

Some individual farmers paid dearly. The Bolshevics history is full of such cases. They were the so called "Kulaks." Any farmer possessing ten and more hectars of land came under this category. "Kulak (rich farmer) was looked upon by them with contempt and was persecuted. Some of them, hard working honest people were sent with their families to Siberia, leaving behind their farms and everything else.

Still the farmers made out better then the Jewish population. Holding on to their land they could and did sell their produce to the town Jews, who by now working in government workshops and other installations were being paid government wages yet had to pay the farmer black market prices for his produce.

To say that people lived continuously in misery under the Bolshevics would also be unjust. There were a few short moments of surprise if not joy, now and then for us blacklisted.

In June of 1940 when the school year ended, my middle sister Sonia (Sarah) almost nine years old then graduated from grade three. She came

home with an exceptionally good school report and an exquisitely decorated certificate stating that she graduated her class with the highest marks. We were certainly proud of her, but even more surprised that the principal dared to award a pupil with the name of Kantorowicz such an award even when she deserved it and was entitle to it.

So even for us persecuted "capitalistic" family, there was a short moment of pride and maybe suppressed joy.

This does know mean that I, a seventeen year old youth did not have a few short lived happy moments. If only artificially brought on, under the Bolshevics.

Once we all realized that this is our lot and there is no other alternative we resigned to the situation against our will.

A few of us employed in the warehouse, I the youngest, Shalom Bernsztein, a couple of Christian young men, and two retail store managers Asher Pasmanic andYosl (Joseph) Kiselew. The last two used to help us conduct the illegal transfer of cash for merchandise that the bi shots used to take from the warehouse. One could call us a group of conspirators, for had we been caught, we would have been charged as such.

Our mutual fear of being caught held us together and helped cement a trust between us. We used to get together at the house of one of our Christian friends, drink and eat. That Yosl Kiselew was from away. A couple of years before the war he came to Shershev to marry the daughter of Chayah Liba Szterman, Szbinah. The same Chayah Liba where my maternal grandmother, Freida-Leah had rented a room and lived for a time. She, Chayah Liba has been a widow for many years, supporting herself and her only child, Sheinah, by selling yard goods in her half part of the house. The other half belonged to Nehemiah (the stitcher). Behind the house was a large garden and orchard looked after by that Yosl Kiselew. Here I would like to draw a parallel between two former Yeshiva (an institution of higher Talmudic learning) students, as they lived next door to each other.

Way back I mentioned that our next door neighbor, Nachman Feldman, married his daughter to a former Yeshivah student and how the two women, the wife and mother in law constantly looked after him while he was doing nothing all day. In contrast, Yosl Kiselew, a Yeshiva student too, was busy all day in the garden and orchard. We never saw him being idle.

He was at least a dozen years my senior, conducted himself correctly and was very religious as befitting a former Yeshiva student.

At those get togethers after a couple of drinks, we used to eat. Of course, the food was not Kosher (proper according to Jewish dietary law).

As I used to go there straight from work I used to tell my mother that I will not be home for supper. My mother did not object to my having a couple drinks knowing that I will not become a drunkard but she used to make me promise that I will not eat unKosher food. I used to promise knowing well that I will not keep it. Afterwards, I used to reproach myself not as much for eating none Kosher foods, as for not keeping the promise to my mother whom I loved so much and would not want to hurt for anything in the world, yet succeeded in doing so.

What made me even more guilty was the fact that this Yosl Kiselew did drink with us but ate only bread and cheese no unkosher meat.

On a bright midsummer morning, a couple dozen young peasants appeared in front of the ancient and once beautiful but now gutted since the first world war, synagogue. In answer to the Jewish neighbors question as to what they are doing there, they replied that they were brought to take apart the synagogue.

At that time all Jewish organizations had ceased to exist and there was nobody to speak on our behalf. I do not know of anybody protesting to the government, it would not do any good anyhow.

The workers started to collapse the four gigantic pillars of the fasade that supported the large triangular pediment. After chipping away the white plaster of one pillar and some brick, they realized that they are putting themselves in danger of being caught under the falling pediment. They constructed a kind of battering ramp topped by a long polse with a heavy metal point, thus being able to chip away at one pillar from a distance.

The pillar being over a meter and a quarter in diameter gave them a hard time, but eventually collapsed bringing down with him the huge and heavy pediment that came crushing down from its twenty meter height with a terrifying crash.

Every Jewish heart in shtetl grieved seeing the once beautiful synagogue that represented the pride and glory of our shtetl's golden past, when our Jewish community numbered close to five thousand souls, coming crashing to the ground. I and I am sure many others took it as a bad omen, although I never said it aloud.

In the next few days the workers toppelled the other three pillars and started on the high and over a meter thick walls. They had instructions to save as many as possible whole bricks. Before they could start on the walls they had to topple the two pillars inside the hugh hall that supported the ceiling.

Many of us, local Jews watched for hours at the desecration those workers were committing knowing that they are doing it for money and pleasure deriving from destroying an ancient Jewish holy building. I will confess that I was wishing that a couple of them would get hurt. Apparently the G-d, I and other Jews grew up to believe in had already closed his doors and windows so as not to listen to his peoples prayers.

It took the workers a couple of months to tear the walls apart. The last standing wall, the eastern, stood alone as if in prayer with the empy niche of the "Aron-Kodesh" (Holy Ark) clearly visible after the many years of neglect since it burned in the first world war. This eastern wall had no windows and stood there, a solid twenty meter high and over twenty meters wide.

The demolishers succeeded to topple the wall in one hugh slab. It fell straight, unbroken, with its inside part or face down over the mount of rubble of the previously demolished other walls and ceiling like a tombstone over a desecrated grave.

When the work was down, the walls and the thousands upon thousands of intact bricks taken away, on the spot where once stood, true, only a relic and the remains of once a beautiful synagogue. A testament of an ancient, prosperous and numerous Jewish community, all that was left was a five meer high heap of rubble covering the entire space of the former synagogue.

As unbelievable as it sounds, the Bolshevics had the impudence to publish in their local papers that used to be printed in Brest-Litowsk, that in Shershev is operating a brick kiln where twenty thousand bricks are being produced daily.

To think that this was a daily paper that used to be read not only in Shershev and surrounding villages, but in all shtetls and towns in the Brest-Litowsk province and knew about the demolistion of the synagogue. Yet nobody dared to question the authenticity of that article.

We, that is our pre war group still remained tightly knit and trusted each other unflinchingly sharing each others impressions and remaining dreams that were slowly evaporating.

By that time we all came to realize that the Soviet Union is a hermetically closed country. There is no way in and no way out. Even the movement inside was strictly regulated.

With a stringer one spoke about the weather. The only political conversation was limited to heaping abuse on the capitalistic system and countries , above all, on Britain the United States. Above all, never to forget to praise the Soviet system and comrade Stalin.

My friend Kalman Kalfkoif might have been more courageous or more carelessly outspoken than I. He worked during the vacation in the department of health. It happened that in the office one of the desks suddenly fell apart. The workers in the office gathered around the fallen apart table staring at it in silence. Kalman could not stand the temptation and said that what everybody had on his or her mind: "This is a Soviet product." All eyes turned towards him. His boss in a loud and indignant voice reproached him, saying among other things that we do not tolerate ungrateful nor malcontent people. Yet he did not fire him nor did he report him to the authorities.

With his boldness my friend Kalman almost got me and him in trouble. One evening as the two of us walked by the office of the "Komsomol" (communist youth organization), we noticed the secretary still sitting alone at his desk over papers. He was a man close to thirty, tall and skinny. He always looked angry and deep in thoughts, which I believe I am correct on both counts. In my opinion h was a product of the post revoluntionary young generation fanatically committed to the Bolshevic cause, having given up everything life has to offer, including family and friendship. By sitting sixteen hours a day at his desk, he was not the average young Soviet man.

My friend Kalman proposed to go in there and have a chat with him. Why I agreed I do no know. The secretary was a bit surprised to see us, but welcomed us politely not even asking for a reason for our visit.

It did not take long to strike up a conversation. My friend Kalman was the main speaker. Maybe he was bolder than I or maybe did not realize what he was playing with. As the saying goes, " A beaten dog one does not show a stick." His family was not persecuted as mine and I knew only to well whom we are dealing with.

The conversation we had with him so many decades ago is still fresh in my mind. Maybe not word for word, but the text I still remember.

Firstly he wanted to impress on us the accomplishments they have achieved in the year since they came to us. Like the few high schools that they opened in and around Shershev, health centres, recreation centers, which served a propaganda and indoctrination centers. We countered with arguments about the chronic shortages of everything, even the most elementary items, the difficulties in locomotion and the stifling and oppressive atmosphere they brought with them.

The secretary was well versed in his ideology and I must admit that he had some good counter arguments. After a while he proposed, in fact invited us to join the ranks of the Comsomol (communist youth organization), so that

we can contribute to the improvement of the short comings we have just enumerated. Here our conversation turned to the topic of the Comsomol, which the Bolshevics tried hard to set up but so far with little success. In their first year with us they managed to sign up (to recruit) a couple dozen Christian young people and only two Jewish teenage girls. One was Yoseph Maletzky's daughter, he other was Miriam Reitman. They wanted desperately to attract the Jewish youth into their fold and would do anything to get a couple of boys like ourselves which would serve as an incentive for others to join them.

According to Soviet law the potential application to the Comsomol had to have a sponsor himself, a member of the Bolshevic party. The secretarywas so eager to have us as members that he offered himself as sponsor, thus assuring our membership.

My friend Kalman not only refused his favor, but dared to rub his face in mud by telling him that even the few members that he succeeded in having sign up are not committed Bolshevics but did it in order to get the privileges according to members of the Comsomol. The secretary immediatetly asked him if he heard it from the two girls, naming the two Jewish girls names. The secretary in a calm voice said : "Oh yes, we can make you disclose the names. I want however that you should spend the night in your own bed peacefully, so I will forget the incident."

When I let myself by my friend be talked into coming to have a chat with the secretary, I knew I will be walking on this ice, but I never expected to be led so dangerously out on a limb. With the secretary's last remark, my friend came to his senses and became more cautious.

Finally we started to pretend that we are abit interested and would like to continue this conversation, to which he replied that we can always find him there and we will be welcomed guests.

I doubt if he as ever forgotten this conversation with us. On our way out I warned my friend never to play such a trick on me again. I must admit that that night I did not sleep well at all. Fortunately, that was the end of the incident. But from that moment on, I avoided the secretary as much as possible as well as even passing by his office.

The eyes of the Jewish mothers in Shershev whose sons did not come back from the Polish German war a year earlier have long since run dry, but their hope was rekindled by a letter that arrived to my parents from a friend, Chatzkl Krugman's son, Shloime. Shloime was my uncle Eli's age and was mobilized back into the Polish army at the same time as my uncle in Mach of 1939. Unlike my uncle Eli and some of his peers that returned home after

German captivity, the Krugman's heard nothing from their son, Shloime, and assumed him dead.

The arrival of his letter from the Warsaw ghetto in which h notified his parents that he is fine and is getting by, but is asking his parents to send a food parcel to his former boss who is now in Warsaw.

The letter sounded bizarre, so Chatzkl Krugman came in the evening to my parents to analyze it closer. There was no mention about the war, nor about the entire year since then. No mention about his wife either or the reason that he and his former boss are now in Warsaw ghetto and not in Lodz where his boss was a prominent member of the community and well to do even for Lod standard. Finally how come that such a well to do man should be in need of a food parcel, while he, Shloime, who worked for his boss is not asking for anything?

My parents and Chatzkl came up with all kinds of assumptions, but the Krugmans left not less confused than before.

The law of the Soviet Union permitted to send abroad food parcels of no heavier than to kilograms. How much food is it two kilograms? What does one send and what is of greater importance? We in Shershev who were just learning about shortages ourselves could not have understood the shortages and hunger that Jews in the Warsaw ghetto experienced.

For this matter who could? Unless one experiences it oneself.

Chatzkl Krugman who was a well to do man with the biggest yard goods store in shtetl before the war, could easily afford to send the parcel which followed by more letters from his son and his sending parcels to Warsaw. This continued until the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June of 1941.

The summer 1940 was coming to an end. The Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur came and went. If at the previous New Year and Yom Kippur the Jews were grateful to the Bolshevics for coming to us instead of the Germans, that gratitude disappeared due to the living conditions under them. If it sounds ungrateful.

One has to consider the fact that we did not know the situation under which the remaining Jews of Poland lived. That is under the Nazi regime, as the Bolshevics prohibited any criticism of their allies, the Germans. Secondly, the Nazi persecution of Jews did only assume the immense scale until their attack on the Soviet Union. As in the previous year, Jews were forbidden from being absent from work and we considered it a desecration of our holidays. I had to work but like the others I fasted that Yom Kippur.

We were entering the second year of Bolshevic domination. By winter 1940-41, the former petty merchants slowly found their niches in the Soviet

economy. Some got jobs with the government and some managed to eke out a livelihood by being middle man on a small scale.

It was a precarious way of getting by under the constant threat of being sent to Siberia. They used to buy something from former merchants who managed to salvage something of their merchandise and resell it to someone who needed it and was willing to pay the price.

The life of the middle man, or as the Bolshevics used to call them "Speculants", was a hazardous one, the unfortunate one that got caught paid dearly.

In general, people were getting by as if sitting on a powder keg. In a sense, in order to exist, everybody was breaking the law. It was only a question of how soon one will get caught.

Among many proverbs going around at that time, was one that categorized the Soviet population in three groups. Namely: one that was already in jail or Siberia and is out for now, one that is in now and one that will be.

Taking in consideration the unofficial figure of imprisoned people (there was never an official) in the Soviet Union at any time that stood at forteen million, the proverb was very close to reality.

The Bolshevics did not celebrate Christmas. Instead they celebrated New years entire three days. It was one of the two long holidays in the Soviet Union, the second was the anniversary of the revolution. Those celebrations we used to spend in the main office of our business organization drinking vodka but being careful not to overdo it in case one might slip a word that can later deeply regret.

This is how we welcomed the year 1941. Officially the Soviet policy towards Nazi Germany did not change but one could feel unspoken change. The Soviet paper eased up on the praise they used to heap on Nazi Germany and their victories in North Africa. In general Germany stopped being mentioned so often in the paper. One could even hear from time to time a not so complimentary remark about Germany from an eastener.

There were some Jews and non Jews in Shershev that were working in or around Brest-litowsk. Where they worked or what they were doing they were under orders not to say, which in itself was no surprise. As everything was a secret in the Soviet Union, but rumors were circulating that they were building fortifications.

That winter, that is February 1941 I turned eighteen years old. I considered myself grown up earlier but now I was grown up formally. I recall that night laying in bed wondering as to what the future holds for me.

I, in all my naivety and youthful dreams still intact, made a resolution to dedicate my life to my people, the Jewish people.

How long this resolution lasted, I do not know, but taking in consideration my situation then and the events that followed I would say not too long. Would the events that followed taken an other course, or if not, at least not in such a scale that shook the world and its process destroyed a thousand year old Jewish life and existence in Europe, maybe many others dreams would have had another ending among them maybe mine too.

One has to admit that the Soviet propaganda had at times an effect on certain segments of the population, especially on the youth. Their movies used to depict their heroes in a bright light and young people tended to fall for it. Their patriotic and idealistic songs used to size young and dreamy hearts and move them to tears.

I, myself, with so many unpleasant encounters and experiences with them used to catch myself being carried away with their songs. The reality however, used to bring me back to consciousness. Back to my sense.

And so did the winter 1940-41 pass. The holiday Pessach, (Passover) was approaching, the second under the Bolshevics. The preparations to it were not easy. In fact even harder than for the previous one. It became more difficult to get white flour (wheat) for matzos as well as its baking. The Kosher butcher were being persecuted even more as they were interfering with the government agents in buying up cattle. The procuring of hops and honey for making mead too became a problem. Somehow it was done.

Actually we had the best commodity for obtaining anything we needed, much better than money or anything else. It was Polish, pre war vodka. Much higher priced than the Soviet one. Of course one had to be careful, for as I mentioned several times earlier, it was punishable with jail. But what was legal in the Soviet Union? This was the life style and we ha to live by it.

In general the holidays, under such conditions had lost much of its importance and holiness. But Jews have held fast to it as if with clutches. Even though we had tobe at work, never the less we celebrated the "Seydorim", the festive meal eaten on the two first nights of Pessach as kosher as in the pre war years.

I have already mentioned the large Soviet military forces that were stationed in Brest-Litowsk proper and in the military barracks near Pruzany. I also mentioned the secret fortifications that were being built in and around the Brest-Litowsk fortress. I will also inform the reader that near Pruzany and its outskirts the Bolshevics were busying in building two military air ports, stationing in the town an entire air force regiment wing. The airman,

the most privilaged part of the Soviet armed forces, quartered themselves with many Jewish families in Pruzany, but it helping them economicly.

To point out the intensity with which the Bolshevics were building those two airports will suffice to say that not only did they employ every available and willing to work man there, but they brought two thousand short term criminals from inside the Soviet Union to help with the work.

Among the men from around Pruzany that were employed were some from Shershev that used to commute daily back and forth. They used to relate about the magnitude of the construction that was going on there.

We, the inhabitants of the area, did not know if that's being done due to the nearness to the border vis-a-vis Germany or is it taken place right across the entire Soviet Union.

We did not have to wait long for the answer. The school year 1940-41ended Friday the 20th of June. The very same day in the mid afternoon my sister Sheva came home from Pruzany after graduating the final year of the Soviet high school. That night we had the traditional Friday night meal not having the slightest inkling that his was our last truly Sabbath meal.

The next day, Saturday, I went to work like every other Soviet employee. After work we all had supper together. During supper my sister told us that a couple days earlier they, the students, were informed that the not out of town students will have to gather Saturday evening in school from where they will be taken to the unfinished yet air ports. There they will undergo certain exercises that will go on through the night. She, my sister, expressed her delight for not having to participate in those exercises thus coming a week end earlier.

There was no mention in Shershev schools about semi military exercise, so we accepted my sister's remarks light heartedly not giving it a s econd thought nor did we wonder or question the reason of the exercise. As for me, it left my mind the moment we finished the meal when I stood up to announce that I am going to the boys.

My first visit was at my friend Kalman Kalbkoif, from there we went to Itzik Maletzky (Malecky). To our question if he wants to go for a walk he replied that he is that night on duty in the power station. Here I will mention that in Shershev we used to have power from dusk to midnight. As Itzik was only one year older than I, thus being almost nineteen, he had no authority to start the motor. It was his older brother, by two years, Nachum who went to start it. Not wanting to leave our friend alone the boring three hours from nine to midnight, we decided to come along and spend the time in contest with the huge and loud motor to see who can be louder. As of lately the

motor became capricous due to the shortage of proper replacement parts. The large diesel motor had to be started with the help of a tank full compressed air that propelled it at first.

That night, like some nights in the past the motor would not start. After three or four tries the compressed air was gone and the motor remained silent.

In the night of the 21st and 22nd of June 1941 the couple streets and lanes of Shershev were enveloped in darkness. All that was visible were the pale light in the windows coming from the kerosene lamps.

For the Jews of Shershe, the Jews of the Soviet annexed Polish territories, as well as the Jews of all eastern Europe, it was the last night that they went to bed peacefully. For ninety five percent of them that night never ended.

In June the twenty second the sun rises early in our parts of the world. So it was on that memorable Sunday June 22nd 1941. Being the only free day of the week people were not in a hurry to get up and out. When I got out in the street at nine I noticed a couple groups of people talking with interest but not with concern about the few carts with workers that left for Pruzany this morning but were turned back three kilometers short of their destination, despite the fact that they worked in the construction of the military air ports.

This calmness did not last long. A rumor spread that last night the nearby town of Pruzany was bombarded which nobody was willing to believe. Shortly after we could see the entire party leadership gathering in their office which was in Joshuah Pinsky's home. While inside the meting was taking place the many militia men were going from house to house announcing that a general meeting of the entire population will be soon taking place in the market square. Indeed the population started to gather immediately.

At eleven that morning all the big shots in shtetl with the first party secretary in lead appeared on the podium. "Balabutkin" the first secretary began with those words : "Today at the crack of dawn the aggressive Nazi army attacked the peaceful Soviet Union. The Nazi beast stuck its swines snout in our Soviet garden." From there on he continued in promising to pay Germany back for its aggression and how the Red Army will make ash and powder of them and so on. The first two sentences got stuck in memory. The rest is a blur.

After the speech the crowd drifted slowly away. Small groups of people remained to discuss and speculate as to what the near future will bring.

For me and my friends that was the second time in this many years that we were going through such exciting moments. In contrast however, to the situation almost two years ago, this war was promising to be a more balanced one than the Polish German.

Indeed, we have seen and heard of the ability of the German army, not only in comparison to the former Polish army but even to the French modern and mechanized army and its Majino line as well as the British at Dunkirk, not to mention the rest of Europe that fell to Nazi Germany. But we have also seen the hugh numbers of Soviet tanks and numerous army that appeared a much better match than all previous opponents.

The general opinion in shtetl was that in the worst scenario if and when the Red Army will have to retreat abit we can decide when the time comes, so far we have nothing to worry about.

That late morning and early afternoon many planes flew over the skys of Shershev. They flew too high for us to be identified. Walking with my friends in the street I remarked that today the Soviet flyers are paying back the people and the country for the good life they had in the Soviet Union. There was no doubt in our minds that those were Soviet planes going back and forth on bombing missions behind the front lines and must be taking some loses. It never dawned on us that those were German planes and are flying unchallenged with impudence over the Soviet skys.

The last couple hours of that Sunday afternoon passed in suspense and expectation not knowing of what and why. The Moscow radio gave little information about the situation on the border and we, so close to the border, less than eight kilometers as the crow flies, could not comprehend the unusual quiet.

At about six in the late afternoon, as if carried by a whirlwind the news spread that the Easteners, that is those that came to us from the Soviet Union are leaving town. As if to confirm the fact I get to the market place in time to see that the Easteners are coming from all directions. The single ones and the married ones with their families. All either empty handed or with tiny suitcases or knap sacks. They climb in panic into the overcrowded open trucks that seem to be ready to spill over. There is a shortage of drivers. A couple of militia men go to Eli Neibrif's house and bring him. He, Eli Neibrif, was one of the drivers in the supply organization that I worked for. He refuses o go unless Noah Hofman will come along. Noah Hofman was one of the porters in our warehouse and used to travel with Eli Neibrif to Brest-Litowsk for merchandise. A couple militia men go and bring him. He climbs aboard one of the dangerously overloaded with humanity trucks and they all depart.

The local Jews are numb at what they see. What is happening here? The huge Soviet Union with its mighty army is going down without a fight? Her representatives are running away the first day of war being a hundred

kilometers by road to the border or front leaving us Jews to the mercy of the Nazis? What will happen to us? Is it possible that the Soviet Union will fall apart even faster than Poland?

Suddently the scorned upon and despised Soviet Union became dar and loved by us. In an instant we forgot the bad times and askance looks we gave them. We would give everything to have them back. With broken hearts laden with despair we waited for further developments.

We lived at that time with my grandparents Kantorowicz. As everybody else I too left my friends and the group of people that was dispersing home heavy hearts as if the nearness of ones own and dear ones would offer some kind of protection and comfort even strength for the days to come.

Before dark, my father sent me to his brother Reuven's house. As Reuven, did not come home for that Sunday from his work place in the military barracks near Pruzany. We were all worried about him. My aunt was alone at home with the children. With her were her three children, Michlah, two years younger than I, Shalom, a year older than my brother Liova (Leibl) and Shevah, who was five at the time.

As downhearteda as we were, I found my aunt and children in a much greater despair bordering on panic. The fact that my uncle was not with them certainly did not help.

Half an hour after my arrival we heard a tremendous explosion. It came from the air and from the ground with a momentum that shook every house in shtetl. Looking out the window I saw a b rightness like a ball of fire that reached high over the horizon that came from the direction of Pruzany.

Even I with no idea of explosions and never saw one until the, could tell that it came from a great distance away and was of a gigantic force. We all got scared but I. Having been sent by my father to be the "man" in the houses, tried hard to hide my fear and lamely assured everybody that there is nothing to fear about. When the second explosion was heard my cousin Shalom, who just turned thirteen, began begging his mother and children to lay down with him on the bed, then maybe when a bomb will strike it will kill us all bringing an end to our fear.

We slowly began to move to the bedroom. By the time we entered it a third explosion was heard. This time the other two joined him in crying. Not my aunts and not my clumsy attempt to quiet them down did much good. They slowly subsided only because the explosions ceased.

We sat like this by the light of a kerosene lamp until the two younger ones, drained, fell asleep. It was midnight when my aunt told me to go home. I did not need much coaxing wanting to be with my parents. I left quickly.

As I was going home though the dark and silent streets, I had the eerie feeling that the street is already devoid of its inhabitants.

At home, except of my younger eleven year old brother Liova and my two little sisters Sonia, nine and Liba seven, everybody was up, sitting around the living room table dimly lit by a kerosene lamp. Their lips barely moving they spoke in whispers as if the Germans were already in the next room.

The few hours of night left, passed in anxiety. We were in the street early and so were many of the Jewish men standing in small groups or going from group to group hoping to hear some news. All one could hear were assumptions to which I could have come myself.

One prayer was on the lips of all the Jews; We need a miracle that the Bolshevics should come back, now they would indeed be welcomed and appreciated.

To the concern of the approaching Germans I also resented and grieved over the fact that while we will be absolute loosers, the non Jewish population will have a double victory. Not only will they get rid of the Bolshevics but they will also see the downfall of the Jews for whom they carried an ingrained centuries old dislike and outright hate.

That Monday too, began with a beautiful sun rise. Although the mood of the shtetl Jews was weighed down as if by a heavy stone. At ten o'clock in the morning drove in one of the trucks that left yesterday with the Soviet bureaucrats. This one to was fully loaded with the same men, but only the men, there were no women or children among them. For a moment the Jews of Shershev thought that their prayer has been answered. If I may be forgiven the L'Havdill ( )distinction I would say that if the Messiah for whom we Jews have been waiting millennium would have come he would not have been welcomed with more joy than that truckload of Bolshevics. They in return did not accord us any attention just went into their party office and shut the door behind them.

After a few minutes they sent a couple of their own men for Srulkah (Israel) Mayster the blacksmith and ordered him to break open the safe from which they needed to retrieve some documents. Apparently in yesterday's rush to leave, they misslayed or lost the combination. Now they had to break the safe open. For the constant hammering they needed several men that kept on coming and going. From them we found out that they just came for those papers and will be leaving again. The exhilaration soon changed to despair.

While this was taking place panes were continually flying overhead. This time we knew whose they were.

Still the presence of the Soviet bureaucrats was a sign that the Germans are not on the outskirts of the shtetl. At noon we heard the clatter of metal over the cobblestone street and in the market square appeared two Soviet tanks that came from Kamieniecker Street, the closet direction to Brest-Litowsk. The tanks were covered with a thick layer of dust which was no surprise coming from that direction, the short cut direction to Brest-Litowsk that was sandy and in summer dusty stretch of road. What was said and disturbing was the sight and number of tank crews that were sitting all ove the tops of the tanks. Every available space on each tank was taken up by a tank crew member that was covered with the same thick layer of dust as the tank itself. All that was visible from under the dust was pairs of eyes turned towards the sky watching out for German planes. The tank crews looked helpless and scared. Apparently they have already tasted German air attacks and lost their tanks to them.

During that Monday afternoon a few such small groups of tanks passed by the shtetl. One such group seemed to be better organized. They had along a large truck full with barrels of fuel. A couple tanks were driving ahead and a couple behind. From time to time a single tank used to pass, a single pitifully lost unit.

At four in the afternoon, the easteners had the safe opened. Taking their papers they left in a greater hurry than the day before abandoning the shtetl for the second time.

The crowd slowly dispersed to their homes in search of imaginary security or at least solace.

Now, having seen the route of the Soviet army in our parts, we all foresaw the downfall of the Soviet Union in a matter of days. We were still alive and did not know what Hitler had in store for us. We knew that we have to go on living.

That evening my father decided to reclaim our house that the Bolshevics took away from us without any compensation. When the Bolshevics took our house away from us, my parents hung on to a set of spare keys. The irony of it was that my father and I went that late afternoon using those spare keys to open the doors after almost two years.

The none paying tenants left the contents undisturbed. True, one could see that they left in a hurry as many items were scattered, but they left everything a family can accumulate. To our surprise there was everything. They, the elite of the bureaucrats had apparently an unknown to us source of supply. Besides the nice furniture and clothing there was a store full of assorted food stuff that was never seen in the main warehouse. I can still see

the hundred kilogram sack of sugar, not the loose but in lumps and the many other things by the dozens of kilograms.

Overwhelmed and frightened by all this, we withdrew, locking the door we went back and spent the night as before, with my grandparents

The next morning, Tuesday, my parents decided to start slowly and cautiously moving over to our house. Ech one of us took something in our hands and we started back home. My mother and sister Sheva, began to straighten things out, somehow with little enthusiasm, spending most of the time with the rest of us looking out the windows. We were expecting the Germans arrival at any minute, in fear not knowing what it is going to be like or what to expect.

There was no progress in putting the house in order. Soon we found ourselves together looking out the windows at the empty market square, silent and empty as I have never seen or experienced in all my life.

At exactly eleven o'clock before noon, a few German motorcycles pulled in from the south side of the market square. That is from Kamieniecka Street. Each motorcycle had a side car attached to it in which another German was sitting holding on to the two handles of a heavy machine gun mounted on the side car. They stopped in the middle of the square just opposite our house, leaped out of the motorcycle, machine guns at ready. They formed a large spread out circle around the motorcycles.

The sight of the Germans did not disappoint our expectations at all. They looked the way we imagined them to be, hard and I would add ruthless faces. They moved about with well rehearsed precision and skill, taking in with their glances all around them. They looked to be as if they were born in their uniforms already machine guns in hand. Within minutes few more motorcycles arrived and what seemed to us without command, they dispersed to every street and lane taking up what must have been to them strategic positions.

Within a quarter of an hour, there were groups of Germans all around the out skirt of the shtetl. All this was accomplished without a loud order or even a single hot. It seemed that they knew exactly where to go and what position to take up in advance.

In my mind I was comparing the German soldiers to the pre war Polish ones which we used to see during manoevers. Their saddened dispirited faces, unenthusiastic slacking response to command or the Soviet soldiers in the ill fitted uniforms, the ignorance of modernism, the primitivism, the complaisant approach to the officer, the open faced good natured smile of the Russian peasant boy, did not add to good soldiering.

Yes, I did assume that those were the elite of the German troops, but even as such they were impressive, outright frightening. Some young boys slowly tried to get closer to the Germans challenging their tolerance, but a motion with their weapon was enough to stop the bravest.

Every few minutes more and more Germans kept on arriving by truck and smaller vehicles reminiscent of the later days allied jeeps. I would classify them as motorized infantry as there was no heavy weapon with them.

As the traffic increased, it just continued on via Mostowa Street toward Pruzany.

We postponed moving over to our home until the army will pass in a couple of hours. But instead, as the day progressed, so did the number of the German soldiers. Some did make a stop, but the bulk kept moving on.

After a while we had enough of looking at the Germans, we locked the two front doors of the house and went outside into the yard to sit on the steps of the back entrance as it was still hot at four in the afternoon. There, sitting we were analyzing our situation. Suddenly we were confronted by a group of German soldiers that found their way through the lane way that separated our house and our neighbour Nachman Feldman. The lieutenant in charged addressed my father with one question: Are you the owner of the house? Hearing the confirmation the officer announced that they are taking jover the house temporarely. But the lieutenant, sir, where should we go? This I can not help you came the reply. What about everything inside? Asked my father. Don't worry, everything will be looked after and remain in its place. You can't touch anything and must leave now.

And so we were expelled once more from our house and went back to my grandparents Yaakov-Kopel and Chinke Kantorowitz.

With night, what we considered to be a trickle of military traffic during the day turned into a flood. Heaven and earth turned into a tide of soldiery. A steady flow of uninterrupted soldiers was pouring over the street. Not only over the cobblestone middle of the street, but on either side of the sidewalk.

My grandparent's house was close to the side walk, so we did not sleep much that night. There was no let up to the motion of the Germans. On the second day, tanks and heavy artillery began to pass. It was the first tme that not only I, but my uncle Eli, an artillery man in the Polish army, saw the German mechanized cannons pulled by threaded tractor like vehicles on which was mounted a platform with four or five benches. Each bench sitting four soldiers. When those vehicles used to pass by, the pane in the windows used to vibrate.

The heavy weapon and machinery took up the entire width of the road, and the infantry marched on the side walks on either side of the road.

Groups of German soldiers began to break into Jewish homes helping themselves to whatever they needed or could carry, from a needle and thread, to mens underwear, sweaters and shoe to women's clothing. We did not even dare to protest and were glad when they used to leave the house.

Such reprieves did not last long. Soon another group used to come in to ransack the house again.

As Jews, we were not eager to go out in the street, so we tried to spend a bit of time in the yard which was quite spacious. It had a gateway that was closed by a high and solid gate. The rest was surrounded by a just as high and touching fence made of heavy planks that made it inaccessible to prying eyes.

After locking the front double doors we used to get out in the yeard through the back door for a bit of privacy. This did not deter the Germans too much. Seeing the doors closed from the inside they used to start knocking on the door with their rifle stocks. It used to happen that after a few knocks, they used to leave to go to another house, but if the knocking persisted, my grandmother or mother used to open the door. Let them in and help themselves to whatever they found of value.

On Thursday, the 26th via alleys and yards, I made my way to my friends, the brothers Laizer and Litek Rotenberg. Two of our friends, Kalman Kalbkoif and Itzik Malecky joined us a short time later. In a group we dared to go out in the street, although the market square was full of Germans. Their march had not slackened up for a minute. We set out in the direction of Kamieniecka Street, the direction from which the Germans were coming.

The second building on the right side of the street was an old Russian Orthodox church sitting in a large yard. Behind it was a large orchard belonging to the priest of that church. That orchard was referred to as the priest's orchard. All that yard, orchards, and the yard of the nearby priest's house was taken up by German soldiers. Before we got a chance to see what was going on there, a few German soldiers got a hold of us leading us into the church yard. One of the things the Germans had already set up was a mobile bakery. Nearby we saw a pile of logs, first quality timber for making planks. A German pointed out some kind of machine and showed us how to use it. It was a power saw. We were ordered to cut the beautiful building material into small pieces as fuel for the bakery.

The nearby German auto repair unit soon found out about the few young Jews and made us pump the truck tires they were repairing. A truck tire needs four-five hundred pumps to fill it up, which is not an easy task. Before night a German escorted us home, for which we were grateful.

Apparently, I was good and tired after that day's work, for I fell asleep immediately, unlike the previous nights. How long I slept, I don't know, but sometime in the middle of the night, I was awakened by a loud crash at the door and loud German voices.

How the Germans succeeded to open first the closed in porch door and the outside and inside doors of the house, I don't know, but suddenly they were in the hallway. They had before them three doors, to the right that lad to the kitchen, the left one to the part of the house where my grandparents and their son Eli lived and straight ahead where we lived.

They apparently broke up into three groups for in no time some were in our living room and at the entrance to one of the two sleeping rooms. By then we were all awakened and almost fully dressed for we did not get completely undressed since the war began. A couple soldiers noticed my sister Sheva and yelled out "Ain Medschen" A Girl!! I do not know how my mother managed to muster so much presence of mind, in one jump she was at the window with one motion unhooked the window hooks and pushed the window outward. The window opened to its full extend, my mother yelled "Jump out Shevelah". There was no need for my mother to repeat, my sister was over the window in a second. Seeing her out my mother turned to me and said "Go with her". Being half asleep I did not realize what was happening nor the earnestness of the moment, I just jumped. We were in a lane between my grandparents and a neighbor's house. To turn left, the lane led to the street a dozen meters away which was full of marching nd riding on German trucks. To the right deeper in the lane and on the left side of it was a Jewish home. Behind it was a few stalls almost touching each other. Parallel to the stalls but behind them was a large stable belonging to a further neighor Avraham Rosochowski.

Fortunately the driving and marching by Germans did not notice us. Partly due to the noise of the motors and marching feet. To turn left was out of the question, so we turned right. Running by the Jewish home, I did not dare to stop for a couple of reasons. I was afraid that the German soldiers will run after us and by our stopping we will loose some precious seconds. Secondly, by the time the people will wake up and open the door, if they would even open it, and what good will running into another Jewish home do

if the Germans are after us? All we would accomplish would be getting another Jewish family in trouble.

Running by the stalls, I was looking for a place to hide. Pass the stall, was an open and swampy meadow, no place for anyone to hide. The only place in the dark I could find, was the narrow space between the stalls and the barn. When we tried to squeeze in between them we realized that there is a fence running in between, that marked the border of the two households. Unable jto get in there and in fear that the Germans are looking for us, I climbed up the roof. My sister Sheva who was not twenty yet was an agile girl who did not need any help to follow me. The two roofs were so close to each other that there was no fear of falling off or in between. We flattened ourselves on that slanty roof as much as possible not to be conspicious in prying eyes, awaiting farther developments.

We kept hearing yells and screams in German but did not know if they were coming from our grandparents house or from the street full of marching Germans. The only solace we found was in the fact that we did not hear the sound of gun fire.

How long we were hiding there we did not know. It seemed endless, but we later estimated between one to two hours. Slowly, in the dark, we climbed down the roof, huddling close to the fences we got to the window through which we escaped. To our dismay the window was shut. We dared not knock for fear of attracting the Germans in the street and not knowing who might appear at the window inside.

Having no alternative, we crawled crouching along the fence of my grandparent's yard that extended far into the meadow. Approaching the yard from behind I dared to knock on the door that lead into the yard. The door that led from the house into the yard was locked too but here I dared to knock. Understandably, nobody in the house was asleep and the door was opened immediately.

Everybody had questions. The essence of the story in that the Germans did not run after us. They satisfied themselves by ransacking the house and left shortly after.

It began to dawn, the time we used to get up those days after the sleepless nights. That morning too like all the previous mornings that week, it was a beautiful morning.

And still they kept on marching. We began to think that the entire erman army is passing through Shershev. Neither could we understand how with so much traffic and heavy equipment there were no accidents in spite of our prayers that it should happen.

That Friday morning passed in our silent prayers for an end to the constant marching of the Germans. Maybe we would get a rest to the constant barging in of the soldiers with their brigand faces slowly emptying the house of everything. We also needed break to go out to the local farmers to see if we can get something in food stuff.

Next door to my grandparents in the direction of the market square lived an elderly couple with a single son. The man's name was Mordechai, his son's was Baruch, a young man of about thirty with the nickname of "ox", not because he was a fool or something like it but because of his size. By trade a carpenter and built like a wrestler. A six foot tall man with wide shoulders, barrel chested and thick arms and legs. He looked as if he could carry a house on his shoulders.

On that memorable Friday the 27th of June 1941 (the second day of Tamuz), in early afternoon, the door opens up and in comes that Baruch. His face twisted, the hair disheveled, the clothes dirty and soaking wet with sweat, trembling all over. He wants to say something but all he can do is stutter. The words are struck in his throat. Before he manages to get a word out in comes his parents with confusion and fear in their eyes. His father gesturing in his son" direction, glances at all of us but at no one in particular, asks in a low voice, "nu, what do you say to this?"

We look at him, at his son, at each other as the unease grows in us. Finally, my father asks" What are you talking about? What happened?"

A German soldier entered their house ordered their son Baruch to take a shovel and led him to the large synagogue. There, in the yard of that synagogue between our house, the synagogue, and the mount of rubble left from the ruins o the by the Bolshevics torn old synagogue, he and another dozen Jews, watched as a number of German soldiers are beating savagelya group of people. When their grisly work was done, the entire group was laying on the ground unconscious. The final act of the soldiers was a bullet to the head of each one of them.

The dozen or so Jews were ordered to dig a hole in the middle of that yard, throw the bodies in and cover them up. There were nineteen bodies, eleven Jews and eight Christians.

I like to mention the names of these first Jewish victims of Nazi barbarism in our shtetl and the circumstances that led up to it.

It started with an incident that happened at the end of Bet-Chaim Street, where meadows were stretching far and wide and where Jewish owners of cows and horses used to let their animals graze. Since the sitting at home with the Germans all around was not safer then being out of town and the

animals had to be fed, it was only common sense to drive the animals out on the pasture and spend the better part of the day watching them.

A rumor later circulated that a Soviet soldier who succeeded in avoiding German capture, shot down a low flying German aeroplane over that meadow. This was never confirmed but it served to glorify a Soviet soldier and give a little encouragement to those who prayed for their return.

It is a fact though that on that day the Germans did kill in that meadow a hidden Soviet soldier after a short fire exchange, their forth day in Shershev.

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In their rage, after tasting blood and for amusement, they rounded up the few men that were on the meadow and began driving them into town. On the way dropping in them some houses taking along the males in them.

The largest number of victims were from the Chadricky family who lived on that same street. They were: Ghedalya Chadricky 43 years old, the very same man that used to buy from us merchandise during the Bolshevic earra and sell it to trustworthy customers. After taking this Ghedalya, they entered the other half of that house where his brother Moishe lived taking him age 45 and his two sons Yosel (Joseph) age 18 and Eli, age 16. From a neighboring house they took Zusel Pasmanik and stopped on the street a shoe maker by the name of Dulman, a hard working man and poor as a church mouse. From the meadow they took Berl Zatocky age 30, Jehudl Zatocky's (the blacksmith) son, Ghedalya Loshevicky's 14 year old son, whose name I do not remember and Bentzys (Ben Tzions) Pittel father in his late forties. If I am not mistaken also Chayim Majster, Srolka Majster's son. The eleventh I don't remember.

I true Nazi Manner, the dozen Jews with the shovels while digging, were surrounded by many German soldiers who were ridiculing, mocking them with being shot. A possibility the diggers considered very real. To encourage them to dig faster, the Germans used on them their rifle butts with generousity.

After having finished covering the mass grave the diggers were told to go over to the Jewish houses in shtetl and tell them that if the Jews don't turn in their weapons by four o'clock that afternoon, the entire Jewish population will be masscared.

Those were the first few days of the German campaign in the Soviet Unions, even though we knew that we won't have it easy under German rule, we never expected the to be able to slaughter a score of human beings so

savagely without any investigation. Suddenly, we realized who we are dealing with and what we can expect of them.

The most urgent problem for the minute was the German order to the Jews to turn in their weapons. We knew that there is not a single weapon or fire arm among the Jews of Shershev and the Germans can use it as an excuse for a slaughter. We were still naïve enough to think that the Germans needed an excuse for slaughtering Jews.

The fear that our neighbor Baruch felt, be it from what he has just seen and did, burying those people that we all knew from infancy and the German ultimatum, that same fear over took us all.

It is almost three o'clock in a hour and the Germans will start going from house to house collecting together the men in each of them to be shot. The women are lucky, who on earth would touch a woman. G-D, in heaven, what is happening? Is it a night mare, a bad dream from which I will soon awaken? No, it is not, for when I know I am dreaming I immediately wake up. What should I do? I look helplessly at my parents, at my grandparents, they in return look back at me, at my father, my uncle Eli. The pain, the anguish sets in, the fear confuses common sense. I want to live, I want to run, but where to and how? The streets are full of Germans, until now they were robbers, but now they become blood thirsty murderers.

No, I will not be shot by them, I will commit suicide. I will hang myself. But with what and how? Yes, and where? I look all over the house, nobody is asking me what I am looking for. I find a piece of cord, stick it into my pocket and look for a place to throw it over and strong enough to hold me. There is no place from the ceiling, no place to tie the cord up to. I walk slowly out into the yard and look around slowly, yet find no place. I notice the outhouse, enter and look around. Yes, the thin beams on the ceiling will do. I decide to execute my plan as soon as the Germans will knock on the door. It will give me enough time to run through the back door into the yard ad from there into the outhouse.

Meantime I come into the house with a ready answer in case somebody should ask me where I was. I would not be lying if I said that I was in the outhouse.

Nobody asked me where I was. Everybody was sitting deep in his or her own thoughts, hoping for a miracle.

The marching Germans in the street look frightening enough until now. But now they look utterly terrifying. Every minute I glance at the old clock on the wall and listen to the seconds ticking off. I would stop the clock but know that the German clocks will continue ticking.

It is four o'clock. I look out the closed windows. There is no let up to the marching Germans. They pass by the houses as if our fate does not concern them. Those marching on the sidewalks go by as if the houses don't exist. The clock on the wall is moving a bit faster. It is five and six. What are they waiting for? Maybe for night fall? It is, and the noise of the passing engines and the sound of the hob nailed boots continue. We sit until midnight, after midnight. We try to lie down drained and exhausted from tension and fear. But nobody sleeps waiting to see the dawn knowing that it won't bring deliverance.

The unease and apprehension transform itself into a constant fear that lasted for the next two weeks. If in the first four nights of the German arrival we managed to grab a couple hours of sleep, the events of that Friday robbed us of it too.

When the Bolshevics drove us out from our house a year and a half earlier, my father with the help of our wagon drayer (coachman) Shepsl Rudnitzky managed to dig up the sacks of vodka we had buried in our garden and take it along with our belongings to my grandparents. All that vodka, during the Bolshevic era, was in my grandparents attic.

The Germans having arrived so suddenly did not give us time to hide it better. True, my father did sell some of it during the Bolshevic era but a lot remained. It was fortunate that while the Germans were coming into the house toplunder they never thought of looking in the attic, as the entrance to the attic was in the large hallway that was in the back part of the house. To get up there one had to se a ladder. The ladder for that purpose was most of the time lying on the ground. None of them thought to look up and if even yes, it would be difficult to tell the defference between the matching door to the rest of the high ceiling.

However, in those trying days, we wanted badly to get rid of that vodka. In the evenings I started going up there, coming back with a basket full of bottles of vodka. I used to go behind my grandparents stables into the swampy meadow, turning over the bottles had down, I used to push them one by one into the swamp, deep enough for an accidental by passer not to notce it.

And so I brought down basket after basket full of bottles of vodka that we had salvaged from since before the war of 1939. A fare amount or shall I say, many dozens, disposing of them in a public place, since that swampy meadow was public property.

The bottles of spirit which were ninety six percent pure and not available at all during the Bolshevic era was difficult to part with, as each bottle could

fetch a fantastic price and in abnormal times save or buy a life. There was plenty of material in my grandparents stable and I made from some planks a wooden box. Using some straw I packed into the boxes the over a dozen bottles nailing it shut. Under the floor of the front part of the outhouse, I dug a hole in which I deposited the box, covering it with the same black and heavy soil, replacing the floor and spreading the extra soil around which blended perfectly with the surrounding terrain. Looking around I felt that not only thiefs but even the Germans would not search there.

If in the first few days after the German arrival, one could notice a scarce Jew in the street for a moment, they completely disappeared after that Friday the 27th of June. Not even a woman would are to go out. But Sunday June 29th, two days after the slaughter of the nineteen men, about ten o'clock in the morning, in comes our Aunt Chashkah. If a woman would dare go out into the street it would be her. Despite the fact that she was in her mid forties, she still had a full head of thick light blond hair. She had the stocky Pinsky build and the sure gait that characterised the Pinsky family. Only a personal aquaintance would know that she is Jewish. That was the reason that she dared to come to visit us.

It was a week since the German Soviet war began. She informed us that her husband Reuben, my father's brother who was working in the military barracks near Pruzany returned home three days after the outbreak of the war using back roads which the Germans were not using. They, my Aunt and uncle remained in their home in the market square and had to endure even more than we from the German plundering.

From then on my aunt used to come to see us every couple of days, being brave enough to be out in the street. Jews were sitting in their houses in constant fear, huddling together or in corners of their homes in expectation of the Germans who will come for them to take them away or shoot them on the spot.

It was during one of my aunt's visits that I heard her saying: I pray to G-d that I should lie down, fall asleep and not wake up. I noticed that my parents nodded their heads in agreement and understanding. Until that time such an idea never occurred to me and I too started to hope for a miracle like this.

Still they kept up marching. If we were getting by on what ever food we used to scape up in the house we could not do without water. Early in the morning when the marching Germans were tired from the nights marching and the least disposed to advature, one of us used to get out with a couple pails to the well for water. One used to meet there a neighbor and exchange

the latest news, like who was beaten up or shot over the last twenty four hours.

As in other shtetls and villages, Shershev too had its own half and complete crazies. Those poor souls did not realize the seriousness of the situation and getting a chance to sneak out of their homes unnoticed by the other family members they used to do. Even those the Germans did not spare and shot them, among them a young girl.

The constant marching through our shtetl lasted three full weeks. The last couple of days we stopped seeing German heavy equipment. All we saw were foot soldiers and horse drawn wagons loaded with supplies. As suddenly as they appeared, it also stopped and the street fell silent.

Slowly Jewish doors began to open carefully. First a head and then a person appeared. Neighbors began to gather in small groups to exchange experiences. Nobody dared to move far from ones house.

The night passed quietly. In the morning not seeing any Germans around, my parents decided to see what is doing with our house in the market square. As we got closer still looking from a distance, my father and I did not notice anything abnormal except that it did not have any sign of life in it. We found the doors open and entered carefully. The house was completely empty. Anything moveable was gone, taken by the Germans. All the housewares, clothing, not only mens and womens but even childrens, tools, dishes, furniture, food, everything the Soviet family that left in a hurry plus the things we brought over on the first day the Germans came in. That is on that first Tuesday morning, June 24th.

We did not know who occupied our house during those three weeks of our absence but they cleaned out the house not leaving even and old rag.

That day we carried over a few things from our grandparents back to our house. My father and I spend that night there. Although we did not see or hear any Germans, the fear lingered on. The next day, our wagon drayer from before the war, the very same man that moved us out of our house two years earlier when the Bolshevics took our house away, moved us back in.

A couple days later half a dozen Germans with an officer in charge arrived. They drove by every street and lane in shtetl, stopping eventually in the center of town, that is in the market square. Here they got off their vehicle and walked around the square eyeing every house. They stopped in front of our house, after a short conversation among themselves they come

in. The officer tells my father that they need our house for an "Ortskommendantur" (local military headquarters.)

Again an explusion? Two years ago by the Bolshevices and now within three weeks for the second time by the Germans. My father tries to speak to the officer in a good German. The officer asks my father how come he speaks German so well to what my father replies that jut over twenty years ago, they, the Germans, were here too for three years. The Germans look at each other knowingly and I wonder what they are thinking about. Do they think that they will have to leave this place like their for runners or that this time they came to stay.

The officer thinks for a moment and says: Good, you can remain in the back part of the house, as long as the front part remains inaccessible to you.

My father thanks him for letting us remain in our house. The next day the Germans hang up a big sign over one of the two front entrances to our house that says "Ortskommendantur."

I do not know how and who arranged it, but within a couple of days, there was a provisional civilian adminstration in shtetl. A police force consisting of a group of young local gentile ruffians that were showing off their newly acquired Russian rifles. The first order of the day was the law that every Jewish person regardless of sex or age has to wear a round yellow circle no smaller than ten centimeters across on the outer garment. Breaking the law is punishable by death.

The Jewish population was ordered to elect from among them ten members to serve in the Judenratt or whatever one wished to call it. Nobody volunteered, but the fate of the community might be in the hands of such a committee and an appeal to those most suitable to join. Some responded to the appeal and agreed to take on that very heavy and responsible function. Among them: Yaakov-Meir Kabizecky (who is married to my aunt's Esther Liba Auerbach's sister, Chayie-Sara), Chazkel Krugman, my uncle Reuven Kantorowitz, Avreml Kwelman, Meir Ghelman, my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel Kantorowitz, the others I do not remember.

Officially they were called "Judenratt" but among us Jews there were referred to as the committee. Their first function was to submit a list of all the Jewish families and amount of members in them so that they can receive the amount of bread allotted for each mouth.

The next day the Jews of Shershev realize that the allotment is nothing more than outright mockery, as the amount of bread could not sustain the life of an infant. It becomes a matter of living or starving. People started to improvise, that consists of taking something from the house like a dish or

garment to a Christian farmer and try to get for it something in exchange in food, like a bit of raw flour, or maybe a it of barley or cereal. Anything will do, like vegetables. A better item might fetch a few eggs or a piece of butter.

There was no talk of meat. A farmer would not know what to ask for a cow, besides the ritual slaughterer would not dare slaughter a cow. A chicken? The farmers became very choosy and did not know what to ask for a hen. Nobody wanted money. The Russian ruble became worthless, the German mark was unavailable and secondly, nobody knew its worth.

What ever the Germans needed or wanted, they took without even a thank-you.

All able bodied Jewish men were ordered to report to work every day at six in the morning. The order comes from the local authority made up of local Christians. Who appointed them to this office, the few Germans who lived in our house or did they appoint themselves? Nobody knows.

The only place where several hundred Jews could be put to work was the highway. We were divided up into groups of fifty along the road. Our boss is a local Christian who was the road supervisor during the Polish and the Bolshevic era. His job was to keep the highway between Shershev and Bialowieza in good repair. Normally he used to do it himself with a gang of temporary workers. Suddenly he found himself in charge of several hundred Jews and overnight this simple peasant, in his eyes, became a general.

He used to ride on his bicycle from group to group pointing out every hole or spot that needs repair. The holes had to be filled with sand and cobblestone on top. As far as all of us could remember, the highway from Shershev to Bialowieza has always been in good repair not only due to the proper upkeep but also due to the very light traffic on it. In fact, I doubt if it was at all built for heavy traffic. The constant traversing of the German tanks and iron threaded artillery pieces grinded many stretches of the road into the ground, leaving the road in need of repair.

Despite the fact that the bulk of the German army was by that time deep into the Soviet Union, the traffic on that stretch of road was quite heavy. Some detachment of the army used to pass by without paying attention to us, others used to stop to amuse themselves with the Jews. As a result many of us used to come home from the days work eaten up badly and bleeding.

Along the highway we often used to find unmarked graves of Soviet soldiers, who were shot by the Germans after surrender. At that time the Germans considered them a nuisance and hindrance in their rapid march eastward.

During the three week long German march through Shershev, we often used to see single or small groups of Soviet soldiers being led out of town followed shortly by gun fire. Rumors used to circulate that Soviet prisoners were being shot.

Now that we were able to move about more freely, we used to come across those graves in fields and meadows around Shershev.

In their rapid advance into the Soviet Union, the Germans succeeded in cutting off many Soviet soldiers from their retreating units. They found temporary shelter in the heavy forest of our territories. Slowly, however, hunger drove them out. Some tried to follow behind the German army hoping to find a way and cross the unmarked front line to get home. Others having seen the disintegration of the Soviet army, in resignation, began to surrender on mass. Still others out of outright hatred for the Bolshevics surrendered willingly.

Nothing good awaited them in German captivity, ,mostly execution or starvation. It did not take long for those still hiding in forests to find out what the Germans are doing with the prisoners. Instead of almost certain death in German captivity, they decided to hold out in the forest as long as they can.

Those were in fact the first, the avant garde of the later numerous Soviet and pro Soviet partisans that the forest of eastern Europe were teeming with during the German Soviet campaign.

On a hot late July day of 1941, as I was working with my group on a stretch of road, from the forest appeared two young men dressed in Soviet military uniforms. They looked as if they slept in their uniforms on the ground a long time and ate very little. Finding out that we were Jews and not any danger to them they asked us the direction east and which side roads they should take to avoid Germans.

Having received our instructions, they continued not through the forest but along the narrow clearing between the road and the forest.

No more than ten minutes later along comes a local police man on a bicycle, whom we knew for a drunkard and scoundrel from a long time back. His first name was Tolek. He peddles his bicycle with his rife on his shoulder. He passes us by slowly looking at us with a visible superiority. He continued and disappeaed around the bend of the road where the two unarmed Soviet soldiers disappeared. We hear two shots and a couple minutes later this same Tolek appears coming back in our direction. Passing us again slowly by with a wide satisfied grin on his face, the face of a cat that just swallowed the canary.

We ask each other, is it possible that this despicable creature would shoot those two young men? Apparently it also moved the road supervisor, for he got on his bicycle and drive in that direction. He is back with one comment: a pity, such young men.

A day or two late while working on the road, we notice a long row of horse driven buggies approaching from the direction of Bialowieza. As they get closer we see they are farmer wagons loaded to capacity with assorted household goods. As they are escorted by Germans communication with them I difficult and dangerous, yet we did find out that they are from villages in the Bialowieza forest, that they were ordered to load up their wagons with all they can take along, leaving everything else behind. The Germans did not waste time in taking for themselves their cattle, other livestock and anything else they can use. At the end setting the village on fire.

The escorting Germans were riding on bicycles and was easy for them to stop for a bit of "fun" with us, the Jews.

The expulsion of entire villages became a daily occurrence. Slowly we were finding out that the Germans suspect them of giving food and help to the remnants of the Soviet soldiers still hiding in the forests, mainly in the largest in central Europe, the Bialowieza Forest.

A few days later we hear that the Jews of Bialowieza have been expelled, supposedly to Pruzany. The question arose whether we too will share in the fate of Bialowieza Jews and the mood became even more oppressive. Everyone was wondering as to what will come next. Right after the army stopped marching by and the supposedly civilian administration took over, there was not a day that did not bring a new decree.

The Gestapo headquarters for our district was situated in Biala-Podlask, a few kilometers west of the River Bug, by car a couple hours to us. But the immediate authority over us was in the hands of the German police, so called "Shutz-Politzei" (protection police) which was situated in Bialowieza, 35 kilometers from Shershev. They got into the practice to come by trucks, suddenly and uannounced, park in front of a couple Jewish homes and with the help of the local police used to load up everything in those homes at the same time murderously beating the inhabitants. They did not stop house by house, but at random picking on houses in different streets, thus keeping everybody in constant suspense and fear.

There were times when the leadership from Biala-Podlask used to come along. Then it used to develop into a major operation with many more police and trucks. They used to round up as many Jews, men, women, children as they could into the market square. There, they used to pick out the men,

tormenting and torturing them with exercise and what they called gimnastics, kicking them with their boots, beating them with clubs and rifle butts, in the process, leaving behind many beaten up and bleeding Jews.

In such cases, those that were working out of town on the highway fared better.

It is possible that in such cases the women and children suffered as mcuh if not more than the men having to watch as their husbands, sons, fathers and siblings were going through such torture.

The gathering, or better, the herding of the Jewish population used to be accompanied by rifle shots which were heard way out of town and for us working on the highway, not knowing what was taking place, was very alarming.

As I said the scale of the action when they used to come from Biala-Podlask was immense. They used to drive around every street and lane ordering the Jewish population to gather in the market square. Then go from house to house making sure that there is nobody left at home. Woe to him or her found hiding in there.

They never entered our house because of the sign "Ortscommendantur" assuming that there are no Jews living there yet my mother used to go out with the children into the square not wanting to risk being discovered at home. My father knowing what is awaiting him in the square used to hide in the wood shed. Working on the highway I was spared this torment. Never the less I used to get a day off and it was during such a day that such an attack or invasion took place.

Not wanting to go out into the market square, afraid to remain at home, I quickly decided to run to "Doynovka." Those were marshes that began behind Ostrowiecka Street for kilometers in lenght and in places bottomless. My father decided to join me. I do not know why, for he always used to hide in the wood shed. Did he feel safer in the marshes or did he want to keep an eye on me? I never knew.

In the confusion of running, yelling, beating and shooting we managed to make our way through alleys to those swamps. There lying submerged up to our necks in mud we listened in fear and anxiety to the constant shooting that came from the center of town.

What was taking place in town we did not know but from the yelling, screaming and shooting that reached our ears, we imagined the worst. I prayed with devotion to G-d as never before that he should bring my mother, brother, and sisters safe home again. I even made a vow that if they will all

come home safe and sound, I will say my morning prayer every day like a devout Jew.

Slowly the firing subsided and finally ceased. A couple hours later that seemed like an eternity, at about mid afternoon, we started slowly crawling closer to the center via the Christian homesteads on Ostrowiecka Street.

When we got to the part of the street where the Jewish homes began, we found out that the Germans had already left after a particularly cruel and indeed savage visit.

My father and I ran home to see how my mother, sisters and brother faired after the days ordeal.

From my mother we found out that this time the Germans did not spare the woman and children either. Lining them up four-five in a row they were threatened with being shot with one bullet per group. My mother could not stop talking about my middle sister, Sonia, who was then nine years old, as she was pushing herself in front of my mother saying: Mommy, I will stay in front of you this way the Germans will kill me and you will remain alive.

Dear dear little sister of mine. You naïve, innocent child of Israel, Your cruel fate that evaded you then caught up withyou a year and a half later.

That day the Germans singled out the rabbi and the older Jews of the community. They beat up the rabbi terribly and after ordered him to do all kinds of exercise. When they saw that his sweat is taking on the colour of blood, they put him under the water pump ordering another old Jew to pump the cold water over him.

After conducting searches in some of the nearby Jewish homes and helping themselves to everything of value, they left leaving the Jews wondering as to when they will be back.

We did not have to wait long. A day or two later, they were back. The very same as the last time, from Biala-Podlask, but with a much smaller escort. They immediately called the Jewish committee (Judenratt) telling them that they will be back in five days, and that there better be ready for them two hundred thousand rubles and a kilogram of gold.

The raising of the rubles did not present a problem as they became worthless, but the kilogram of gold did present one in a small and poor shtetl as Shershev. Men contributed their wedding rings, women the wedding rings and earrings ad the needed amount was collected.

Having it all collected a new problem arose. Where can it be kept safely away from the Bialowieza Germans or the local peasant police? No house was safe as the searches and plunder was conducted at random.

It was decided that the safest place in town is our house, for apparently the Bialowieza Germans could not imagine that in a house with a sign "Ortscommendatur" might be Jews in it.

And so it was that a suitcase full of rubles and gold was brought into our housed where it stayed under my parents beduntil two members of the committee came to pick it up on the designated day.

The Germans must have been happy with their haul for they left the town immediately.

Unable to get enough food, be it by barter, exchange or any other way, we were forced to fill our stomachs with anything that was available In one of my free from work days, I and a couple of my friends decided to go to the forest to pick mushrooms. The part of the forest we went to way only two kilometer out of town and well known to us from our pre war excursions there. We just got into the forest when we noticed the first Soviet tank. Approaching it we could see the heavy massive doors wide open, dozens of shell casings lay about as well as dozens of unexploded shells.

We realized that the farmers from that part of the shtetl closes to the forest detected the tanks as soon as the Germans passed by. They emptied the shell casings, helping themself to the gun powder and having no use for the unexploded shells, they left them behind.

The tanks carried no visible scars of battle attesting to the fact that they were abandoned by the crew. We came to two conclusions: one, that the tanks ran out of fuel, the second that they realized that the road they have to take in order to retreat to the east, is already in German hands. They either surrendered or tried to make it on foot.

Looking around we saw over a dozen more tanks undamaged like the first one. We did not see the machine guns nor their ammunition, which offered three possibilities; one, it could have been taken along by the crew, by the farmers or by the Germans.

It pained us to see the undamaged tanks that fell into German hands without firing a shot. To my mind came the words of David: how are the mighty fallen?

Such became the routine in August of 1941. Most able bodies Jewish men used to report for work at six, bringing with them a shovel, ax or pickax, march out to the highway, three kilometers away, work till six and go home.

There was nobody with a club over us, ,but the passing by Germans used to stop often for abit of amusement. Making us load up the wheelbarrow with rocks or sand to capacity and push it on the rough road on the run, accompanied by beating.

In the shtetl proper the riots by the Bialoweza Germans and local police continued. Not only were the Jews in whose house the plunder used to take place being beaten up but any Jew noticed on the street by the roaming Germans could expect it too. As our house was being avoided by the Germans it became a refuge for neighbors, friends and acquaintances.

Just like before the war our store was a gathering place for local Jewish politicians, so now became our house. Those very same men but now dejected and struck with fear, in quiet voices almost in whisper, they continued to talk politics. It did not have the same character nor the speculative assumptions of years gone by, it was more like wishful thinking. Everybodies hypothesis used to circulate around the shtetl and when it used to come back to the originator or its source it was unrecognizable and at time taken for a fact. Even dreams used to be interpreted in countless ways, each to ones wish and liking.

In retrospect I am still not sure if our short lived optimistic interpretations were intended to give hope and encourage others, or is it human nature to full oneself?

The only outspoken realist was my father's youngest brother, Eli, the veteran of the Polish German campaign and for his gloomy predictions, he was branded a pessimist.

Despite the visible reality, dark predictions and prophesies, nobody foresaw the fast approaching last days of the five hundred year old Jewish history of Shershev.

The Jews of Shershev tried to explain the expulsion of Bialowieza ad Gajnowka Jews, by reason of them living smack in the middle of the forest. As Shershev was some ten kilometers away, our chances of remaining were much better.

Still the Jews of Shershev began to take precautions. We reasoned that in case of expulsion we will have to leave everything behind. It is worthwhile to try and hide some things. There was the unrealistic hope that the Bolshevics will return, maybe even over night. The Germans won't have time to empy every Jewish home, even with the help of the gentile neighbor. They certainly won't have time to look for hidden property. We knew only too well that our Christian neighbors will be more than happy with our expulsion. They would be the real beneficiaries. But maybe even they won't be able to find every hidden item.

It was up to ever individual's ingenuity to find hiding places.

We had two big wood sheds in our yard. Starting with one we dug in it a large hole in which we buried two large wooden chests full with clothing.

Before we lowered the first chest, on the very bottom of the hole, I dug a small hole in which I deposited a small wooden box with my personal momentos, among them to me my most precious possessions; my stamp collection. Having covered it with earth, we put on top the two heavy chests. My reasoning was that if anybody will dig up the chest, they would never think that beneath it another half a shovel of earth might be hidding something else.

After covering the chests with earth and disposing neatly with the rest, we covered the whole spot with a high pile of wood.

Having finished with this wood shed, we did the same in the other. There we used wooden cases that the vodka used to be shipped in. The same cases in which we buried vodka two years earlier. In those cases went in our silver cutlery, the good dishes, a real china tea set which my mother used at very special occasions. My father bought it years earlier in a splurging mood and other things alike.

We bured it in the same way as in the first shed.

A year or two before the war, my mother bought a black fur coat made from Alaska seal. She wore it once or twice. I do not know of anyone in Shershev who had such a coat. This coat, some of my mother's dresses, a couple of my father's suits, we hid under a special hiding place we made under the steps leading to the attic. It would take an expert to find it.

Leather too was a precious commodity. My father bought a fair amount when the Bolshevic came in 1939, especially sole leather. This we shoved in between the double floor in the back vestibul. From those days of stocking up, we had several pairs of mens and ladies new shoes. This went between the roof beams in the attic.

Pertaining to jewelery, my mother had a heavy gold pine consisting of fused together chain like links each two centimeters in diameter and over half a centimeter thick. From it another chain used to run down in a semi circle connecting to the other end of the pin. It was a family heirloom left to her by her mother, my grandmother Freida Leah, a pair of golden earring. The two items my mother did not turn in to the Germans one kilogram demand. My father's golden pocket watch with an inscription in Russian and a long golden chain attached to it. He used to wear it at special occasions in his vest pocket with the chain dangling across his middle and a handful of Czarist golden coins. All this went into a glass jar and buried between the outhouse and fence.

The house still seemed to be full, but we did not want todig up the sheds too much. It would look suspicious. To dig in the yard proper, would be

ridiculous as the ground used to be to often traverst and trampled to the state that any touch with a shovel would be a give away. Besides, if we did plan to hide something, we suddenly ran out of time.

Sunday evening, August 24th 1941, right after dark, a military vehicle parked in front of our house. Who and how many uniformed Germans there were I do not know, for a Jew did not go out after dark. Some of the Germans entered the front part, the Ortscommendantur. Through the wall we could hear loud voices and commands in German but were unable to make out anything due to the thick walls.

About half an hour later we noticed a group of civilians near and in front of our house. It did not take us long to realize that they were Jews. My father and I quietly went out to see what is happening. They turned ou to be the members of the Juden Ratt (Jewish community). They hae just been brought together by the newly arrived Germans and ordered to go around to every Jewish home with instructions that every Jewish male without exception between the ages of 16 to 50 should report tomorrow at six in the morning for work.

As uneasy as the Jews of Shershev slept in those nights, the little rest they would have gotten that night, was them denied. We sat up that night trying unsuccessfully to guess as to what the Germans had in mind to do with us.

Every minute was long but the morning came quickly. At six all the towns Jewish males were gathered near the shed of the volunteer fire brigade, a total of some four hundred men. We were surrounded by a detachment of uniformed Germans with the brown cuffs and collars. The very same that used to come to plunder from Bialoweza and Bjala-podlask. The so called "Schutzpolizy."

A German called out in a loud voice if there is anyone among us who speaks German. The first to answer was a Jew from Brest-Litowsk who was brought by the Bolshevics to run the pharmacy in Shershev. To me he looked over fifty, yet he showed up with us. In any case he raised his hand and came forwards. The German spoke to him in a loud voice, loud enough for all of us to hear. We also understood it. The man repeated it loud and clear in Yiddish with a German intonation, making sure that not only we Jews understood, but the Germans too. Apparently, something was not clear to one of ours, not realizing the severity of the situation, he interrupted the interpreter with a question. A German barked at him with these words: "Hold your snout accursed Jew."

The German decree was as follows: We,the men are to go home and bring back with us our families. All the woman, children, young and old,

infirm. Whoever will be found home will be shot. The women shall take with them food for two days. As we Jews are being taken to a labour camp where the men will work. In return we will receive a roof over our heads and food.

For the past two weeks, since the expulsion of Wjalowieza and Gajnowka, the possibility of such a moment was in the back of our minds, yet when it happened, it came as an unbearable shock. What is going to be with us, what conditions will there be in that camp? Will there be anybody to look after the old and sick or will the Germans let them expire witout medication? Will we get clothes now that the winter is approaching? Will we be permitted to move about? Will we get enough food or go hungry…..

Suddenly heaves fell on us. What is happening to us? Why and for what sins? What have we done to deserve such punishment? My two little sisters and brother are looking at us and cannot comprehend what is going on. What does it mean to leave the house and not to be able to return? Not to come back to their beds at night? The Germans are taking us somewhere, where to and why?

My mother looks at the children and weeps bitterly. It grieves me deeply to see my mother cry. My heart aches as much watching my mother cry as from the misfortune that befells us and maybe more. We don't even try to comfort one another. We just stay with weight down heavy hearts.

There is no time to lose, the sun is up and it is warm already. My mother is the more realistic of us all. She tells us to put on a lot of clothing. I put on two suits, one on top of the other besides the extra couple sets of underwear. On top of all this I put on a three quarter lenght winter coat. My mother and sister Sheva are helping the little ones to get dresses.

The crowd is already gathering in the market place right in front of our house. my mother prepared a small bundle for each of the children including my sister Sheva and for herself. My father and I do not dare take anything. We do as we are told by the Germans. My father takes an ex and I take a shovel. We leave the house together my father locks the door putting the key in his pocket.

Outside we gather separately. The men each with an ax, shovel or pick ax to one side, the women, children and old people to the other. The loud crying of the children and subdued weeping of the women can be heard all around as there is an unusual silence around. Nothing looks real, for these very Germans that used to come to plunder, terrorize us yelling and shooting several times a week are now silent, as if they themselves are ashamed of their unholy deed.

It is ten o'clock the entire Jewish community has gathered. I seesick old people laying stretched out on the cobblestoned square. We take the german warning seriously.

I looked around and made a decision to stop being a boy and act like a man.

We heard a command to form a column three abreast. In that part of the square was a well unused for my time. We were being led past the well and ordered to dispose of our tools, except for ten men that are told to carry shovels.

The order to throw away our tools puzzled me. What good are we without tools, unless the place we are going to has better ones. Still I felt an uneasiness.

We were led out of the square into Mostowa Street followed by the voices of the crying children and loud wailing of the women The street, the main street entirely Jewish is empty. We march in the middle of the street escorted on either side by the very same brown cuffed shutz polzei.

I looked around at the homes in which Jews lived for generations, for as long as Shershev existed over five hundred years. Nobody is looking out the windows. One does not see the Jews that used to busy themselves this time of year in their gardens. They are marching now with me to an unknown future, leaving behind everything they toiled for a life time and the generations before them.

We came to the end of Mostowa Street and beginning of Pruzaner Street which except for the first few Jewish homes is entirely a Christian one. Here, just like the Jewish street, this one was empty too. It looked as if the fear of the Germans act affected them too. Here and there a pair of eyes looked out through a curtain. I wondered if it is really the fear of the Germans that drove tem behind the curtains or are they hiding their smiles of contentment derived from our misfortune.

We left the shtetl behind. A few hundred meters further we were ordered to stop. The Germans picked out a couple dozen younger boys taking them to the end of the column . They were told to led the German bicycles by hand. The officer in charge annouces in a loud voice that if any one of us will escape or even attempt to escape twenty five of us will be shot. We know the Germans and take his word for it.

We hear a command to go forwards. The Germans march along us on either side. Some of them are bending down and picking up heavy sticks, others are taking their rifles off their shoulders. We are ordered to march in step, whoever does not receives blows with a stick or rifle butt. But how can

you march in step when the German near you yells "right" and the one two meters in front or behind you yells "left" or the one on your side yells "one" meaning left. The sticks, clubs or rifle butts start falling over us.

The Germans are not particular where the stick or rifle butt falls. It can be the head, shoulder or back. Neither are they satisfied with hitting you once. When they let go of you, you are already beaten to a pulp.

We are perplexed over what is happening. In town they conducted themselves towards us almost humain for Germans. Have they brought us here to beat us senseless? How can they expect to get any work out of us? Another hour like this and nobody will be in condition to work. A thought comes to my mind; maybe they are not taking us to work at all. They just fooled us all in order to give us a good beating. If so, what will happen to the woman, the children, and the old we left behind. The old that were laying half dead on the cobble stoned square?

I am not the only one with such thoughts. I can see it in other despairing faces. I hear others being beaten mercilessly yelling "Shima Isroel" (Hear o Israel, the last words Jewish martyrs utter before expiring). I too am in despair and mad at my G-d for letting it happen.

The cries of "Shima Isroel" become louder and more often. In my hopelessness I think to myself, "Yes, yes, a lot of good can do you now the Shima Isroel."

We are ordered to sing. How does one make four hundred frightened confused and constantly being beaten men to sing. The beatings become more savage. We begin to sing so to say, each his own song. It was a horrible sound carried from four hundred throats that could have chilled the blood in any human vein or frightened satan in his lair, but not the Nazi executioners.

How does one describe such a picture where several hundred men are being forcibly driven out of their homes, torn apart from their families being led on a road to an unknown fate yelling (supposedly singing) on top of their voices and being mercilessly beaten by raging mad Germans.

We are be ing taken over by a jeep that passes us very, so very slowly. The passengers are officers of the very same brown cuffed police. One with the most insignias (badges) seems to be in charge. He looks older than the others. He looks at every face. Having come to the very front of the column, the jeep turns around coming towards us at a crawl. Now he can see everyone of us and is scrutinizing every face. He recognizes somebody. It is Yaakov-Meir Kabizecky, a member of the committee. The jeep stops, the officer gets out and we too are ordered to stop. Yaakov-Meir is taken out of

the line and brought to face the officer who asks him in a loud voice: Have you got leather today?

I hear whispering that this is the big shot from Bjaly-Podlask and was in Shershev several days earlier demanding leather, which the committee could not deliver.

Now in parting he decided to have a bit of fun with the Jews. Not waiting for an answer he started beating him mercilessly.

That Yaakov-Meir was not forty years yet, a tall and strong man who could withstand a beating. The Germans kept on hitting him until he ran out of steam, so they let him go. Yaakov-Meir's neck was bleeding badly. Quickly running into the the column, he positioned himself between two tall men putting up his collar.

When the German caught his second wind, he began looking for him again. He drove up and down the column several times but did not find him. The jeep pulled away.

We resumed our march. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, we were orderd to stop, set down on the road cross legged and look straight ahead. Except for the screaming of the Germans or the thump of a stick over a Jewish back, there was a total silence on the road or on the surrounding fields. Suddenly the silence was shattered by a single shot. The ten men with the shovels were called to the rear where we could all hear the order to dig a hole.

Now it became clear to us the reason ten men were ordered to take along shovels as we left Shershev.

The first victim of the march was Avrom Shlomo's (Chinkeles) son, whose name nobody knew. We called or referred to him by his nick name "Kulie" (Polish-Russian for lame or limping) having been born ith a deformed leg and was limping noticeably. His father died years before, leaving behind a wife and several children. They lived in a little house without floors at the end of an ally near the swamps. They had no visible source of income and lived from alms. Dressing in discarded clothing or rags that even the poor Jews of Shershev would not wear. Their poverty was beyond imagination.

He was not yet twenty years old, but because of his impediment he could not keep up with us and was disposed off in Nazi style.

As soon as the diggers covered the grave, which too was done under constant beating, we resumed the march.

We did not have to march long before somebody else unable to keep up with us fell. He was shot and the burial procedure repeated itself.

While we, the marchers used to catch our breath during a burial, the ones with the shovels had no rest at all. Just the opposite, they worked hard at digging while they were being beaten.

The day was a sunny and a hot one for the 25th of August and we were dressed for December. It seemed that even the heat of the day was against us. Still nobody wanted to discard the outer clothes, desperately hoping that we are being led to a work camp.

We made a couple more stops that morning to bury our dead. Shortly after midday came a sudden order to get off the road to one side, sit down on the embankment with our backs to the road and not dare to look behind. A minute or two later we heard passing trucks from which ear piercing screams from woman and children could be heard.

Those were our families we left behind in Shershev. Our mothers, and grandmothers, sisters and brothers, young and old being driven somewhere. They, noticing us cried out to us, but we were not permitted to look at them.

As soon as the truck passed we continued the march stopping only to bury our dead every half hour or so. I was wondering as who will tire sooner, will it be us from receiving so many blows or will it be them from constant hitting us. How can creatures like them go on all day long beating and shooting people that they have never seen or known.

In mid afternoon we reached Pruzany. There at the outskirts of town at the fork roads leading to Kobryner and Seltzer Streets on the green meadow, we collapsed broken physically and mentally.

The Germans left several of them to guard us while the others went to eat.

Jews from Pruzany came to see us but we were not peritted to get close to each other. To say something aloud, one risked receiving a good beating. My father's brother and sister came out to literally look at us, no more than that.

After an hour or so we continued our march. Until now we all hung on to our extra clothing we were wearing, but in the mid afternoon, battered, exhausted, thirsty and at the end of any hope, some began to discard part of it. Mostly the older among us who valued it more than the young did it in the hope of easying the march and maybe save their lives.

During those hopeless hours when one of us turned his head and looked back, one could see strewn along the road items of clothing. To an uniformed bypasser , it might have looked as if the column of marching Jews are deliberately leaving behind markers in order to find their way back home.

Sadly, if one would have come to such a conclusion, one would be grossly mistaken. Those were Jews of Shershev who were by force and

violently torn away from their families and homes a few short hours earlier and now are voluntarily disposing of the last of their possessions. Literally, the shirts of their backs.

The march was not getting any easier. Anyone who fell and could not get up or got up to join the march only to fall again, was shot. The worst had, were the few men with shovels who had no rest at all.

They soon realized that they can't keep it up for much longer and when a German was not looking, used to drop lit and continue marching. The Germans did not make much of it, just pointed a finger at the one nearest to the shovel barking "pick it up".

At about six in the afternoon we were led off the main road several hundred meters into a farmers large homestead. Its yard was large and overgrown with grass. In the middle of the yard was a well. We were ordered to form a single line for water. While some of the Germans were watching us, the others gathered near the well and as we were approaching singly for a drink, the searched us. First we were told to empty the pockets, warning us that if one will hide something from them, he will be shot. In this we had no doubt and gave them everything. They took everything, even our passports.

Exhausted we stood in line which seemed not to move. The Germans were thorough searchers. Whatever money we had hidden or sewn into our clothes we gave them.

One of the diggers running by me, noticing that no German is watching inconspicuously let his shovel drop. Another German passing by saw the shovel, looking at me hissed "pick it up". No sooner did I pick up the shovel when another one went by motioning to me to follow him. I joined a group of five others and the six of us were taken behind a farm building where we were told to dig a hole.

For six men to dig there had to be room and the hole was wider than needed for one body. What made us very uneasy was the fact that they took only six diggers and there was no body. For whom then are we digging the grave? Now I also felt the taste of being a digger. The three Germans lowered their rifle butt over an back that tried to straighten up. I don't know if it was due to the hard labor, extra clothing or the fear of digging my own grave, that I perspired so much that my top winter coat was wet. I noticed the others were just as wet.

When the hole was finished, we were ordered to lie in a row face down. I was sure that those were my last seconds and I remember thinking to myself that death is not so terrible. Soon I will get a bullet in my head and my world

with its suffering will end. But should I be spared for some reason, I will nevr fear death any more.

With such "lofty" thoughts, I became aware of other voices. I hard the command "throw him in", then "get lost", followed by a shot. We were ordered to get up and fill in the hole. I looked in and see a well acquainted man by the name of Moishe Gleser who was married to Sara a year ago and a father of an infant. He fell apparently at the entrance to the farm and died instantly for the bullet that entered below his right eye tore off a piece of cheek but the torn cheek nor that hanging part of the face was bleeding.

We covered him fast and one of the Germans led us straight to the head of the line to drink. But before we were permitted to drink we were thoroughly searched, taking from me every penny my parents gave me before leaving home, including my passport. For the record, it was U.S. currency that we all divided up.

By the time they were through with us the sun began to set and they started driving us into the barn. I will say that there was plenty of room for all of us to tay but very few found a space to sit down. As a result the majority spent the night on their feet.

As they closed the barn door behind us my father said to me: If they want to get rid of us now all they need is one match. In reality he was right, for the thatched room would catch fire like a tinder box engulfing the building with us inside.

However they did not. Instead at day break they drove us outside in pouring rain, lining us up like the previous day ordering us to march.

Apparently the idea of marching along a column of Jews in rain cursing and beating them did not appeal to the Nazis, so we were ordered to get off the road and march in the ditch along it. By then the ditch was filling up nicely and we were marching in water anywhere from ankle to knee deep. For us it turned out to be a momentary blessing for the Germans marching on the road could not reach us with their clubs or rifle butts.

It was too good to last long and at noon the rain stopped and our luck ran out. We were ordered back on the road.

I want to point out that during all that morning we had not lost a single man.

The Germans wanted to make up for lost time, so they came upon a new idea. They lined themselves up on both sides along the road for a kilometer or so and ordered us to run under a gantlet of clubs and rifle butts. We only stopped at the other end of the German line.

Understandably we had a couple of casualties either from a disabling blow or simply unable to run that far for reasons of age, exhaustion or the standing up all night in addition.

Again like the day before, we had to sit down cross legged until the victims were buried. This time however, instead of sitting on the dry ground we sat in deep mud.

Those of us who thought that the running is one time affair were grossly mistaken, for as son as we got up from the ground we saw the Germans lining up like before. We ran again and a next time. With each run the number or casualties kept increasing. It got to the stage that we did not stop to bury two men. We were making stops for no less than four or five. Those that fell were grabbed by the arms and legs by four men and carried along until the stop.

As a rule they were fully conscious and knew clearly what was happening.

One of the drawbacks in running was that if one used to fall the ones behind him could and many times used to trip and at times pile up into a heap. Here the Germans used to have a ball, trashing the bodies with all their might. If one noticed the pile up, he used to avoid it by running around it but thus exposing himself to additional blows. Those on the bottom of such a heap, used to be so trampled that they were unable to get up and by it seal their faith.

It suddenly dawned on me that my father at 48 being one of the older men among us might fall or trip over someone. I made my way to the rear of the column from where running forwards I would notice him should he be in trouble.

My decision was a timely one. I barely covered a couple hundred meters when I notice people falling one over the other creating a pile up. I took a good look and noticed my father almost at the bottom of the heap. I do not know where I found the strength, but I stopped in the middle of the running column, anchoring my feet in the muddy ground I held back those behind me. They had no choice but run around me. Quickly I lifted my father putting his left arm over my shoulder I wrapped my right arm over his waist. I was protecting him from the left side. As we had to be three abreast and everybody in the panic was on his own, a third man joined us. Thus I have succeeded in positioning my father in the middle. The safest of three places.

However holding my father I could not move with such agility as before and avoided the blows which so far I succeeded to a great degree. Suddenly I noticed the end of a club coming towards me very fast. Maybe if I had a free

hand I might have succeeded in protecting my hand, but I did not. The blow landed on my head and for a moment stunned me, but instinctively I knew I had to run and did so.

I came to my senses immediately and tried to avoid blows as much as I could. I used to change places with the man on the right side, holding my father's right arm over my shoulder and his waist with my left.

It happened when I was on that right side that I noticed a German delivering a blow to a young man who fell. The German was not satisfied with it but continued to hit him. Meantime running we were getting fast closer to them and I noticed that the victim was Motl Shocherman, the twenty two year old son of Moishe Shocherman. The half a minute running that took us to get to Motl Shocherman he was already laying motionless by the side of the road. His tormentor taking him for dead or half dead left him and joined the others chasng us. Suddenly with his ultimate strength that Motl made a final attempt to try and get up. Laying on his stomach he succeeded in pushing his upper body up and from his throat came a horrible cry. At that moment came along another German and with a thick club delivered a low to his neck that made Motl hands give in and he fell with his face to the ground. That German left him and continued to run after the column. Motl tried a second time to prop himself up on his hands, a third German came along, stopped, raised his rifle and pulled the trigger.

It was the first time that I saw a man being shot so close to me and with such affect. His entire skull was torn off spraying us passer by with dropletts of blood.

We continue running for a couple hundred meters more before we stopped to bury our dead. As sson as we stopped and lined up, out of line comes Moishe Shocherman, whose name I mentioned much earlier as the conductor of the bus that used to commute between Shershev and Pruzany. He walks over to the nearest German and says to him in a loud voice: You have just killed my on kill me too. He did not have to repeat it. They obliged immediately.

A thought entered my mind that maybe the Germans plan to finish us all up this way. During the next run I began to feel that my father is weakening. As we sat down on the muddy road to bury our dead a German asked if any of us is ready to dispose of our coats. There were many. A farmer was stopped and we were told that whoever wants can put his coat in the buggy. In no time the buggy was filled to capacity. The farmer could not believe his luck.

While a hole was being dug for the latest victims, some Germans used to count us. Others used to look for visibly bleeding men. If the wound used to be obvious that man used to be taken out to join the others waiting to be shot. My best friends Lazer Rotenberg received a blow to the left side of his head and was bleeding noticably. A German ordered him out, pointed to a group of laying or sitting men waiting to be shot he told him to join them. Being two years older than I, Lazer was at that time twenty years old, and in excellent shape, among us always considered a hero. Except for his brother two years his junior Litek, he had nobody among the marching. If anybody among us marchers would try anything, it would be him.

Still following the Germans order, he began to run towards the group of condemned. Reaching them he did not slow down, passed them by and a few meters further jumping over the ditch that ran along the road he ran into a potatoe field.

He covered several dozen meters before the Germans realized that he is running away. Several of them raised their rifles and began to shoot.

We all looked at it praying that he should make it. He fell. The Germans lowered their rifles and turned their attention to us. At that moment he Lazar jumped up and began to run again. Several precious seconds was lost by the Germans before they realized that he is running and started shooting. He fell again and again he started to run as soon as they lowered their rifles. For the third time they opened fire, but by then he was on the other side of the field and disappeared in the adjoining forest.

The officer in command announced aloud and clear that twenty five men will be shot. But first they had to count us for the umpteenth time that day. As we sat three in a row, two Germans on either side of us walked along the column hitting the sitting men on either side with a club over the head and countinued aloud to count for all to hear.

I do not know if deiberately or not, but every time they used to come to the end of the column something did not correspond and they used to start counting again with the banging over the heads.

The diggers started to dig a large grave. It was late in the afternoon, and the Germans started to pick the victims. We were told not to look back while they started to pick those unfortunate from the rear of the column. All we could hear were the word "you, you". Apparently some were unable to get up fast enough, or were not in a hurry to, for who would, so we could also hear the blows and the cursing falling upon those condemned.

I could not resist my curiousity to see whom they are picking. I lowered my head and turned it around for a few seconds to see that they are picking

the older among us. I became apprehensive over my father, yet I hear as they are getting ever closer to us. They must have stopped no more than two or three rows behind us when they had their quota filled.

Although the German said they will shoot twenty five men, they picked out fifteen. Ordering the first five to enter the two by two meters hole they told them to lay face down shoulder to shoulder. Five Germans fired at the same time into the hole. The next five men were told to lay on top of the five just shot, face down but in the opposite direction, that is with the faces on the feet or legs of the others. Another volley and for a another five innocent and pain enduring Jewish souls the suffering ended. The same was done to the last five.

By the time the diggers finished covering the grave, the sun ~~that~~ started to appear ~~a short while earlier was setting~~. We were siting on the ground wondering as to what other surprises the Germans have in store for us.

in shtetl, because only today, the Germans came in town collecting two hundred Jewish men. They marched them away. There are rumors that they were shot as soon as they were out of town. Nobody knows if those Germans are still here or left to do their gruesome work somewhere else.

To remain in the street is not safe. Some of us go into a nearby yards. We find an open door to a barn where in a corner we spend the rest of the night.

With dawn we are out of the barn into the street. We see others of us crawl out from all kinds of hiding places and holes going in the direction of the town center. We join the crowd. In the center among Jewish homes we see two synagogues close to each other as if in one yard. We enter and to our astonishment we see our Shershev women and children all over the yard. Everybody starts looking feverishly for their own. The woman standing look with expectation and fear for their men. Our two days march and its consequences has reached them already. Nobody is in a hurry to tell the newly became widows or bereaved mother of their losses. So they stay there with waiting for their loved ones to appear.

Not finding my mother outside, I run into one of the synagogues where there were sitting one next to the other tightly packed women, children and old people. Some were sitting on their pitiful little bundles, others were sitting on the floor with little bundles on their laps. Among this group of unfortunates, I found my mother and children.

We looked petrified a each other not daring to ask one another about the past two days. Two steps from my mother sat Sara-Brina Malcek with her old mother Yachna. Sara-Brina's husband Pesach with his three sons, Nachum, my friend Itzik and the youngest Moishe were all in the march. Her husband Pesach was one of the victims and at that moment the oldest on, Nachum was just telling his mother about it. She broke out with a loud cry, so did the oldest son as well as the youngest Moishe. The only one that did not was my friend Itzik. He just stood there looking stubornly at a point on the floor without uttering a sound.

Next to them sat the family Rotenberg. The parents of my good friends Lazar and Litek. They were Yosef and Raya with their three daughters, Pola, Lisa and Mina. Nex to them was Raya Rotenberg's parents Yoshua and Bluma Pinsky, both in their seventies.

My mother's face brightened for a second when she saw us, despite the hopeless situation in which we all were, but only for a second the reality was too much to bear. There was so much crying so much despair.

Raya Rotenberg having heard from her son Litek how the Germans were shooting after her son Lazar, as he was escaping, started to lament and mourn him. We started to quiet her down, especially my mother who hearing from me that he ran into the forest. She only got quietier after I had sworn on my life that I should only live as sure as he is alive.

It is difficult to describe the lament of dozens upon dozens of woman who suddenly found out that their husbands or sons were put to death or the cries of hundreds of freshly created orphans. There was not time for gentility or niceties and when a woman with apprehension and fear asked about her husband, one did not hesitate to tell the truth, regardless of how heart breaking it looked at that moment when that woman used to break out with a horrible and unbearable cry.

In our hopeless situation we did not even notice the absent of any local Jew or offer of any help. From the experience of the last two days we felt that the whole world had rejected us.

The absence of local Jews soon became known as the fresh grave of the two hundred local men was discovered not far from shtetl. They too, had their losses and their own mourning to do.

Before we had a chance to have a good look at each other or exchange a few words of compassion, members of the local police appeared. Those were of the same category of ruffians, untamed rowdies that made up the local police in Shershev. They ordered us to leave the town immediately and without delay. But where shall we go? The answer was simple : OUT!! You may go eastwards.

Our family had barely time to get together. Besides the seven of us there were my grandparents Yaakov-Kopal and Chinka Kantorowitz with their son Eli and my father's brother Reuven, his wife Chashka and their three children, Michla, Shalom and Shevach.

We picked ourselves up with my grandparents in their seventies and joined the throng in the street barely dragging their feet.

By chance my Aunt Chaska noticed something. Without saying a word she disappeared behind a house coming back within a couple of minutes with a loaf of bread under her coat. To our question as to where she got it, she answered that as we were passing by that lane she smelled freshly baked bread. Following her sense of smell, she came to a bakery where half begging and half by force she got the loaf of bread.

This was the only food that my entire extended family ahd for the next two days.

And thus two days after our cruel expulsion from home, from Shershev, we experienced another one. If we had during the first one a promise of work and a roof over our heads, now we did not have this much either.

So we left Antopol, the entire community of Shershev, minus those that we left behind in the ground during the two days march, unescorted by the local Jews, who were either hiding in their homes or sitting "Shiva" (the seven days of mourning) after the two hundred of their men were murdered two days earlier.

Yet we did have an escort. It consisted of the local police, the so called Ukrainien police, as those parts were by the Germans included into the what they called Urkaine. Those ruffians, still in civilian dress with their Soviet rifles and "Automats" (automatic light machine guns) rode along us on bicycles while others passed us by stopping at every farm house along the way warning the farmers not to give us any food not even a drink of water.

Some of us on the verge of fainting from hunger or thirst tried to knock on a door only to be refused and driven away. Those farmsteads were a couple hundred meters apart and each had his own well. Those wells never ran out of water and what grieved us in our situation was the fact that they refused us even a drink of it.

To look at the multitude of homeless and forsaken could break anybodys hearts. I tried hard not to think of how my parents must be feeling.

Our family walked or dragged itself along. Some passed us and some fell behind. We were just along the family Pinsky and Rotenberg. We looked at each other and Bluma Pinsky broke out in a heart rending lament. My mother walking near me whispered : It hurts me to see her cry like this, they in their age (in the mid seventies) leaving behind such riches (in real estate and land. Unquestionably the richest in town) and to have to find themselves homeless wandering over desolated forsaken roads without a bite to eat or a place to put their heads down.

I don't know if out of sympathy with them or our own hopeless situation, my mother cried with her. It broke my heart, but what could I say or comfort my mother with hen I felt so helpless myself.

Some ten - twelve kilometers past Antopol our police escort turned back. The farmers along the road began to show us more sympathy, permitting us to fetch water from their wells. I even saw a couple cases where a farmer came out on his porch cutting up a loaf of bread he handed the pieces to the children.

As the day progressed, so did the hunger and some parents began to accompany their children in begging for a piece of bread. I looked with pain

as my uncle Reuven went with his son Shalom, not quite twelve years old yet, to a farmers house. When the door opened, the farmer's wife came out on the porch holding a loaf of bread and a knife. She started cutting up the bread and distributing it to the surrounding mob of children. My cousin Shalom, not being an aggressive child was pushed aside by other boys. My uncle standing from a distance pointing at his son said " Please give him a piece of bread." Those words were not easy for my uncle to say, for I noticed a tear rolling down his cheeks.

I thought to myself, how can it be, my uncle Reuven. Reuven Kantorowitz, for sure the richest man in negotiables and cash in Shershev, stands now begging for a piece of bread?

Our progress on the road was a slow one. We covered about fifteen kilometers when the sun began to set. We are in the middle of a road that runs between fields. We cannot go back and do not know what is expecting us ahead. Meantime the night is falling. An entire destitute community under the open sky and nobody to turn to. We have no choice. We got down the embankment along the road. Some sit, others lie down.

Maybe some dozen off for a moment. Most did not shut their eyes, still there was not conversation. Everybody is engrossed in his or her own dark thoughts. Now and then a German vehicle used to pass by. They did not stop. Just slowed down to look at the unusual scene that played out before them.

With break of day we were on our feet and dragging on. Those that knew the road say that we are going towards Drohyczyn-Polesky, which we reached that afternoon.

Drohychyn was so far untouched by the Germans although the Jewish population of some neighboring shtetls have completely been slaughtered since the German attack on the Soviet Union two months earlier like the shtetls of Chomsk and Motele. Others, like the small shtetls of Ivanovka where all the males were slaughtered on July 6, 1941 or the town of Pinsk where 8000 males were slaughtered on August 4/41. There were rumors that the orthodox priest intervened to the Germans on behalf of the Jews. How much substance there was to it , I cannot say.

The shtetl Drohychyn was not much bigger than Shershev but the Jewish population was almost twice the size.

We suddenly found ourselves among Jews who despite their own concerns and fears responded very warmly. They saw to it that each family got some bread and before night fall, provided each family with some accommodation with the local families.

It grieves me that I forgot the name of the family that we were assigned to, but it has been almost sixty years and so much has happened since then. They certainly deserve to be mentioned. I do not even remember the name of the street. They did not just empty a room or two for us, as many have done, they just took us in with them vacating beds and bedding us making us feel as if we were family.

They were a family of four, a husband and wife, with a daughter of about thirteen, and the wife's sister. The house was although not new, big with a large garden in the back. The garden had all kinds of vegetables, the potato bed was over an acre in size.

Wanting to make myself usefull, I volunteered to dig potatoes for them but they would not hear of it. They finally agreed to let me dig only for our needs, pointing out where the good potatoes grow.

A couple days later a few Shershev families moved on the quiet to Antopol from there we have just been driven out. They had some family there. Meantime the Drohyczyn committee started looking for a place to settle the Shershev families.

Eighteen kilometers north of Drohychyn was a shtetl Chomsk. A month before our expulsion from Shershev, it was said that it took place on the night of Av, August 3,1941, the Einzatz Gruppen (Special duty troops of the SS) slaughtered the entire Jewish population. The local Christian population collaborated with the Nazis, knowing that they will inherit the Jewish possessions. They searched and made sure that not a single Jew remain alive to claim anything.

After the slaughter they plundered everything the Jews left behind. Now they needed the Jewish skilled tradesmen and artisans to make for them clothes and shoes or to make over the plundered Jewish clothes that did not fit properly.

Being almost exclusively farmers, they needed blacksmiths, carpenters and others. They agreed to let in between eighty and a hundred Jewish families from Shershev.

Thirty kilometers east of Drohychyn was a shtetl Janow-Polesky where a few Shershev families wandered away. Another small shtetl or village of several dozen Jewish farmers families was situated between Drohychyn and Janow by the name of Ivanevke. To supplement their income the Jewish families used to keep vacationers in summer that used to come from Pinsk. A dozen or so Shershev families found temporary shelter there. The rest of us remained for the time being in Drohychyn.

We, now wanting to overstay our welcome at our generous host, decided to got to Chomsk. Before going there with the children, my mother and I decided to take a look at the place.

It was a nice warm September day when my mother and I left Drohychyn for Chomsk. The road was a second grade one and worse. It ran between fields and swamps, kept up by villagers from around that were forced by consecutive governments to dump gravel and stones to keep the road from sinking in the pripec swamps.

We walked with apprehension, fearing to encounter Germans and what's more,. local police who would recognize us as Jews much easier then Germans.

Having covered more or less half the way I asked my mother if she would like to sit down, to what my mother answered with the question, if I am tired. I said yes, which was a blatant life. But I was worried that my mother might be tired and this was the only way I could make her sit down.

We sat down on the embarkment of the road. After a short time my mother said to me; I am grateful to G-d that my legs can still carry me, you an eighteen year young man is already tired and I could still go on. I too was grateful to G-d that my mother could go on, but said nothing.

We did not sit long. At about five in the afternoon, we got to Chomsk.

Like most eastern European shtetls in those days, Chomsk's outskirts were inhabited by Christian farmers. We found ourselves in a Christian street. There were few people in the street, but those few Christians that we met gazed at us in a way that told us everything that we did and did not want to know.

Already after passing the first half a dozen houses, I noticed that the few glances that came our way expressed less sympathy than one favors a stray dog. With fear and dread we continue. The Christian part of the street is a short one and we enter what was five weeks earlier the Jewish part. It is easy to tell by the lack of little gardens in front of the houses. The Jewish homes are closer to the road. But the most obvious sign are open doors and windows of the Jewish houses that served as warm homes for generations of Jews. The windows with their dark background like big holes from which their eyes were torn out and the light gone out. The doors big wide mouths that scream into the street to every passer by asking: Where are the Jews that lived within my walls for generations? The ones that kept me warm and aluminated, that rejoiced and grieved, laughed and cried? What have you done to them? Why?

There is not a living soul in the street. Even the Christian neighbors that helped the Germans with so much ardor to do their gruesome work do not come in the Jewish houses. They had five weeks to take everything that was moveable and now there is nothing left to take.

We walk in a dead street among dead houses slowly and carefully as if not to awaken the dead. It looks like we are in the center of the shtetl, not quite like Shershev. It has not got a town square or market place. The few bigger houses must be the center. There are only three streets extending from the center. We take the middle one. It looks like a former Jewish street. We pass a couple houses and notice between the houses a man. He is from Shershev and got here two days earlier but is afraid to go into the street so he huddles between the houses.

We ask him for Yosl and Brina Pomperanietz. My parents used to be good friends with them. Their haberdashery store was next door to ours. We have heard that they went to Chomsk. The man points to a few houses farter down. We find them and they are talking us into coming to Chomsk. They are two lonely people, have no children and would like to have friends closeby.

I look around, a small house completely empty except for a small table that shakes so badly that even the plunderers would not take it. They are in Chomsk two days and eat potatoes from the garden in back of the house. We are invited to partake in the supper.

We spend the evening in the dark speaking in subdued voices about our helpless situation. The bare wooden floor does not seem inviting so we sit up till late in the night.

In the morning after the same breakfast as the supper, that is a few potatoes, Yosl and Brina took us to see the resting place of the Jews of Chomsk. We continued along the same street which apparently must have been all Jewish, for except the couple houses after the theirs in which Shershev Jews have moved into in the last tow or three days, the jothers cried out for loneliness.

We came to the end of the street whose length was no more than half a kilometer from the beginning to end and came to where the farmers fields began. There, no more than fifty meters from the last house, in which only a few weeks ago lived a Jewish family, we see two mounds, one on either side of the road. Each mound was about five meters wide, the one n the right side was some thirty\thirty five meters long, the one on the left side between twelve and forteen meters long. Their height about one and a half meters. It was situated between the shtetl and the fields, in the middle of a lush green

meadow. Despite the green grass around, there was not a single blade of grass on either of the mounds, as if the grass refused to grow on the mass graves of innocent victims as a protest to G-d and reminder for humanity for generations to come of their cruelty and barbarism.

Yosl and Brina Pomeraniectz told us in halting sentences what took place on this spot five weeks ago. They heard it from the local non Jewish population that so deligently helped the Germans in their gruesome work.

I would like to repeat word for word that what I heard from them then and what was told to me by the local gentiles and the dozen Jewish young boys and girls that managed to save themselves from that slaughter. All this was confirmed to me during our three and a half month stay in Chomsk.

It happened on the nineth of Av, August 3/1941, a day earlier or a day later, when the shtetl was awakened to sounds of shooting and screaming that came from all directions. The shtetl had a population of seventeen hundred Jews and half as many Christians. It had hardly been visited by any Germans in the month and a half since the start of the war as it was situated on a side track in the middle of the Pripec marshes. Still there were circulating rumors about German atrociites against Jews, making the Chomsk Jews uneasy. The sudden appearance of many Germans in such a violent display manner put the local Jews in panic. Unfortunately, the panic was well founded.

The shtetl was surrounded by a cordon of Germans at day break. Others entered the shtetl and began to gather the Jewish inhabitants. In the confusion and as a result of the shooting and screaming some Jews started to run. Those were shot while running. This increased the panic and some Jews began to hide.

The Germans with the very active help of the local Christian population began to conduct searches making sure that there is not a Jew left hidden. The entire Jewish population was then marched to the meadow where the mass graves were situated.

All males, a total of four hundred and eighty were ordered to dig a ditch. When the ditch was finished, the Germans started lining up groups of women, children and old at the edge of the ditch. A machine gun that stood a couple dozen meters away used to mow them down. The bodies as a rule used to fall right into the ditch and the Germans used to line up another group to mow down.

The killing took place in front of the entire community of Chomsk that was watching and waiting for their turn to be shot. While this was taking place, the men were kept busy throwing in the bodies that did not fall inside the ditch and laying them down evenly over the entire ditch.

If the few souls hidden thought that with night the horrible action will stop, they were mistaken. The Germans continued with their hideous tasks all through the night till the next midday, when they murdered the last woman and children of Chomsk as well as the last hidden ones they and their helpers could find.

Satisfied that there are no more Jews in Chomsk, and the nazis were unaware of it that in the dark of the night a dozen young boys and girls managed to sneak through the German cordon; the Germans ordered the four hundred and eighty men to cover up not barely a mass grave but a high heap of humanity consisting of innocent Jewish women, children and old people.

When the men had finished covering their families and loved ones with that blood soaked earth, the were ordered to dig another ditch across the road. When the ditch was finished they too, the entire four hundred and eighty of them were shot in the same manner as their families. They were covered by the gentile population.

The dozen boys and girls that managed to save themselves from that slaughter did not dare to come back to Chomsk. They returned only after we, the Jews of Shershev, came there. Even then they tried as much as possible not to be seen by local Christians who ere not interested in having witnesses to their cooperation with the Nazis in the slaughter of the local Jews.

Our yesterday entry to Chomsk, the walk through the Jewish part of the street, the long till after midnight gloomy and depressing conversation with Yosl and Brina Pomeranietz, the few hours on the bare floor with sinister thoughts in the head and now he sight of the two gigantic mass graves was too much for my mother and she broke out in a heart rendering lament.

I must admit that looking at those two mass graves I tried to imagine what it must have looked like, but in no way could. The mind could not grasp, it defied comprehension.

In that gloomy and depressed mood we left Chomsk. We hardly exchanged a few words on the way back. The picture of a dead shtetl and above all the two mass graves pressed hard on our mind.

Coming back e shared our experience with my father and sister Sheva. If the younger ones, my brother Leibl, sisters Sonia and Liba, understood all of it, I do not know. I know that they knew fear, I saw it in their eyes.

A decision had to be made and my parents decided on Chomsk.

A couple days later, after bidding farewell to our gracious hots, we left Drohyczyn on foot for Chomsk.

We walked into a former Jewish house on the same street where most of us from Shershev were, that is the street at which end were the mass graves.

As we were one of the last families from Shershev w had to settle for one of the last houses on the street and the closet to the graves. One more family moved in after us. It was the family of Hertzka Kaminker (nick named Der Minister).

The house we went into was small, two rooms and a kitchen, completely empty of everything. The local Gentiles left it empty. Fortunately the door and windows were left intact. The little barn in the yard had some hay and fire wood the owner prepared for over the winter. There was a garden behind the barn with some potatoes still in the ground.

Bringing in some hay and spreading it along one wall in one room we converted the room into a sleeping room.

The next morning I started walking over the unoccupied empty Jewish houses coming home with two old tin cans, a couple twisted spoons and a knife with half the handle gone.

The larger can was used as a pail with which I used to go a couple of tims a day to the well for water and the smaller one my mother used as a pot for boiling potatoes three times a day. A day or two later I found an enamel bowl that had more rust on it than enamel which we used to wash in, although we had no soap.

My mother's foresight to put on extra underwear before leaving home and clothing proved to be a blessing. We could put on another set while my mother and sister Sheva tried to wash the dirty ones in water mixed with ashes. After such a wash it used to look a bit cleaner.

We dug up all the potatoes in the garden and took it into the house. Eating only potatoes three times a day we knew that we will run out of it before spring.

When we left Drohyczyn for Chomsk, we left in Drohyczyn my father's parents, that is my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel and grandmother Chinka Kantorowicz with their son, my uncle Eli. Also my father's brother, Reuven, with his wife Chashka and their three children, Michla, Shalom and Shevach.

Several days after our settling in Chomsk, my uncle Reuven came to us to see if it is worth while for him and his family to come too. He, like us, came on foot as this was the only means of movement for Jew and this too was very risky. Like us, he slept on the floor with a it of hay underneath.

In the morning I took him to the two mass graves. Standing near him I watched his face wanting to see the impression it will make on him. For a moment he remained speechless and motionless, then I heard a barely audible murmur coming from his lips; "G-d in heaven, make them pay for it."

With this picture before his eyes my uncle turned around to go back to Drohyczyn. He just stopped to say good-bye, at that moment he was not sure if they will come to Chomsk.

That was the last time any one of us saw him. Apparently he decided to remain in Drohyczyn.

About him and his family I will return later when I will come to events in ghetto Pruzany.

Under Soviet rule, the Bolshevics put up a brick yard works near Chomsk where there were several men employed. As there was no owner now, the local authority took it over. Being short of funds and unable to pay the workers, they turned to the Jews for free laborers. My turn used to come once a week. There in the middle of fields we used to help ourselves to the nearby potato fields and bake the potatoes in the fire. They were delicious.

Another place where we, unemployable, older boys and young men used to work was a dairy where we used to churn a huge churner all day. The generous manager used to reward us for that days work with a liter of butter milk. It used to be a real treat after a constant diet of unsalted potatoes, but we were not destined to enjoy this treat more than a couple of times. There were more aggressive boys than I who became permanent churners for such a highly paid job as a liter of butter milk a day.

Among the Jews of Shershev that came to Chomsk was a large proportion of tradesmen and artisans. They started to work at their trades and had it much easier. All a tailor or dressmaker needed was a needle and thread. Some procured a pair of scissors or even a press iron. True, those tools were in such condition that even the local plundered did not want it, but in a need and in professional hands, those tools served the purpose. The same was with blacksmiths, carpenters and other tradesmen.

All the above worked for the local and the surrounding population, all of whom were farmers. They worked either in their living quarters or went to the farmers. In particular to those who had sewing machines plundered from the Chomsk Jewish tradesmen.

All there was no money in circulation, the tradesmen were being paid in produce, like flour, potatoes cereals. Sometimes a few eggs, cheese or even a piece of butter.

A week or ten days after our coming to Chomsk, my close friend, Lazar Rotenberg came to his parents in Chomsk.

His parents, a brother and sisters, as well as his grandparents, Joshua and Bluma Pinsky came to Chomsk a couple days before us.

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Lazar's experience I would like to record in the next few lines. On the second days of our march as he was running from the Germans in the potatoe field, he felt a light blow, like a lash, to one thigh and then to his other. In the excitement of running for his life he took it for a lash from a twig or a potato plant. Still he had the presence of mind to trick the Germans three times by falling to the ground. Reaching the forest he continued to run over wet and swampy ground for a couple more hours. His shoes came more and more of a hindrance so he threw them away.

After spending the night in the forest he lived for the next three days off whatever he could find in the fields. Only on the fourth day did he venture to get close to a village to find out where he was. Having straight blond hair and blue eyes he was taken for a Soviet soldier still hiding out from the Germans. The local villagers who did not sympathize with the Bolshevics, never the less felt a kinship with the soldier and pointed out to him the safest road east. One villager pointed out a distant road, warned him not to take it for it leads to Kobryn where there were many Germans.

That was exactly where Lazar turned knowing that Kobryn is eighty percent Jewish with over ten thousand Jews.

Covering few kilometer he noticed a head a German patrol on a bridge. All those crossing the bridge had their papers checked except those that were dressed and looked as if they are from the vicinity.

Waiting at a distance he saw a group o farm women getting closer with all kinds of sacks and bundles. Approaching one he offered to help her with her burden. His offer was eagerly accepted and the women knew not to ask many questions. She took him for a Soviet soldier.

All the German patrol saw was a bunch of farm women and a young farm hand carrying grain and vegetables home. They did not even stop to check him.

In Kobryn, Lazar went to the Jewish committee who sent him to a doctor. Fortunately the three places he was shot through were in the fleshy part of both his legs. Those were the lashes he felt running. Few days later he was informed that the Jews of Shershev are in Drohyczyn, from there he was directed to Chomsk.

When he came to Chomsk, his wounds were not fully healed, but he could get around. Within a month he was his own self.

One job I and others felt duty bound was to volunteer for, was to cover from time to time the partly dug up mass graves that the local gentiles used to uncover at night in order to search the decomposing bodies for valuables that might have been overlooked by the Germans during the mass killings. This

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should give the reader an idea of the kind of people or rather animals of pray we lived among.

In the later part of September, when the days became noticeably shorter and the evenings longer, not wanting to sit in total darkness, we used to burn kindling wood in the open door of the brick oven. The light of the burning wood chips was enough to see how to move about in the house. There was no need for much light in a house consisting of two rooms. We had nothing to read, besides the strained nerves would not permit us to sit down for more than a minute or two at a time. So we used to walk around in the house from window to window looking out into the dark street or yard for a suspicious shadow which would signal the arrival of German or local police.

About midnight we used to go to sleep on the hay covered floor. If one could call it sleep is questionable, lying there on the floor jumping up to every sound, every distant bark of a dog and running to the window to look for any motion that would betray the dreaded murderers. Before sunrise we were up knowing that the German "actions" (slaughter of Jews) used to start most of the time at this hour of the morning.

In such an atmosphere of tension and fear we spent our days in Chomsk.

On Saturdays, some of us young boys and girls used to get together in one of the survivors of Chomsk slaughter, listening to their stories of escape. At times we just used to talk and even tell jokes to which not only we from Shershev used to laugh but even the boys and girls of Chomsk. In thoe rare moments of laughter I used to look at those young people of Chomsk trying to understand how they are able to laugh after what they have seen and lost. I used to think that in their place I would not even want to listen to jokes, never mind the laughter. At that time I did not know the extent of human endurance, its recovery ability nor the strength of its spirit.

With fall the weather changed, from the rain the street and lanes became muddy. In such a day I and several others my age were told to move "Sforim" (religious books) from one former Jewish home into another. Both those houses were in a little lane that extended from the main street which in itself was not very impressive. Passing by the main street one in my group pointing to an ordinary house saying to me: Here lived the local druggist with his family, the local Christians intervened in his behalf during the slaughter. They live in the house afraid to go out.

I looked at the house. It did not look empty. It had curtains but neither did I see a sign of life in it from the outside. During the over three months we spent in Chomsk, none of us had ever seen a member of that family. Some

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told me they spoke to them. They perished with all the Shershev families on the second day of "Rosh Hashana" (Jewish New Year) September 13/42.

We walked through the muddy lane to the given house where we found a room half full, that is from the floor heaped half way to the ceiling with "Sforim" (Jewish Prayer books). It pained me terribly to see it, knowing that their owners are all in the ground and their holy books which they treated with so much respect and gentleness, not letting them out of their hand without a kiss, are lying here desecrated by the Nazis and their collaborators.

Our task was to take the books to a nearby house. Upon opening that house we found it full of books. Literally every room was heaped with books from the floor to the ceiling. If there were among them Yiddish or Hebrew books we did not look. We were to depressed looking at the mute witnesses of a recently slaughtered Jewish community.

What hurt even more was the number of "Teffilin" (Phylacteries) that was scattered in the mud over the lane. The local gentiles tore of the "Rtzuot" (leather straps of the phylacteries) and broke open the teffilin looking for hidden valuables. The murderers with their blood dripping hands not content with murder alone had to desecrate our sacredness. To my mind came the part of the "Yom Kipper" prayer about the martyrdom of the ten sages, when Rabbi Yishmual lifting the head of Rabbi Shymhon cried out : How is the tongue, skilled in the words of G-d, brought low to lick the dust."

Dispirited and sad we finished our task and went to our families.

Not all Shershev families wanted to stay in Chomsk where the constant reminder of what happened to the local Jews stared them daily in the face and what at any time can happen to them. Some dragged themselves from shtetl to shtetl, wherever there were Jews to try to find a place for themselves. Some got to Pruzany. There was a rumor circulating that Pruzany is becoming a Jewish town.

My grandparents who were with their son Eli in Drohyczyn decided to go to Pruzany as they had there a son and a daughter with families. They found a farmer who drove them there. Why my uncle Reuven and family did not do the same will remain a mystery.

In the beginning of October my parents started talking about Pruzany. There was no other choice as our potatoes would end in December which for us meant starvation. If the Jewish Pruzany should to be left in its place, at least my father had there his brother and sister, who before the war were comfortable.

Still before we make such a move my parents decided that my father and I should go and take a look for ourselves.

A couple days later the two of us set out for Pruzany. Leaving behind in Chomsk my mother and children. The distance of the eighty odd kilometers led through forest and fields, a dirt road that used to turn muddy in rain. Even though we took off the yellow stars we still had to be on guard, not so much of Germans as off local police who could tell easier who is a Jew and who is not.

Before entering a village we used to ask farmers in the fields if there are police in the village. If the answer was positive we used to circle the village putting on extra kilometers. At dark we came to a village and went straight to the village elder who personally led us to a farmer where we stayed over on hay spread on the kitchen floor.

The farmer would not let us leave without breakfast of boiled potatoes washed down with milk.

Before nightfall we reached Malch (Malecz). A small shtetl of seven hundred Jewish souls and half as many Christians. There lived my father's two first cousins. They were the sons of my grandfather Yaakov-Kopel's sister Lieba and her husband Berl Niselbaum. The names of those two sons were: Yoshua and Zalman.

Malch was a typical Poliesie shtetl with its small Jewish houses and muddy little street and alleys where Jews lived for many generations draming of going to "America" or the land of Israel.

We asked and got to my father's cousin Joshua where we spent that night. That evening as we were sitting and talking about our situation, in comes the chief of the local police who is greeted warmly by my father's cousin. Joshua introduces my father to the chief. It turns out that this chief was also the chief of police in Malch before the war when my father's cousin Joshua was the "Soltis" (village elder) in Malch. The chief escaped the Bolshevics into the wester, Nazi occupied Poland. Now with the Germans he came back to assume his old position.

The chief spent the evening in conversation during which my father told him about the experience of the Jews of Shershev in the last couple of months.

As expected for a chief of police under German rule, but still being friendly with a Jew, he did not make any comments, just kept on nodding his had lightly.

When he left, Joshua said to my father: Actually he is not a bad sort.

The next morning we left for our destination Pruzany, a distance of twelve kilometers. About half way between Pruzany and Malch used to run a rail way track which under the Germans became the dividing line, a kind of

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border between east Prussia and the German created Ukraine. There was no permanent border guard, only from time to time a German patrol used to pass along the tracks.

Before we would get to the track we had to pass a small village. As we walked along the village, I turn my head backward to see behind us some thirty forty meters, a German walking along with a farmer who is carrying in hand a basket. Without loosing time we slipped into the nearest farmers house. We were confronted by a middle age peasant woman and her daughter of twenty-twenty two.

The older woman recognizing us as Jews, asked us with hostility in her voice as to what we came for. We naively told her that we came in to wait until the German passes by. While we were talking to her we were hoping that the German did not notice us and won't come after us.

The peasant woman started yelling and cursing us, screaming on top of her voice that we should get out of her house. To our defense came the farmer's daughter who kept telling us we should stay and wait until the German will pass.

Within se conds a heated quarrel developed between mother and daughter. It seemed that the daughter was communistically well indoctrinated using Soviet slogans and reasonings in our defense. I could see through the window the German and farmer passing by. We thanked the girl and walked out. We gave the two men head way and followed them some fifty meters behind. They crossed the track and turned left on a field path and we went straight ahead in the direction of Pruzany.

Near Pruzany we noticed a large group of Jews returning to town from work. We jointed them and got into the ghetto without a problem.

In fact it was not yet a ghetto in Pruzany in the full sense of the word. Almost all the Jew remained in their homes, except those who lived on the main street "Pacewicza" and its continuation "Pocztowa" up to the narrow gage rail way station. The not many Christian homes that were among the Jewish ones were taken over by Jews. The Christians have taken over the many and bigger Jewish homes on the main street.

Jews from many places were being brought into Pruzany. Places like Bialowieza, Gajnowka, that were expelled from their homes and towns even before Shershev. Half of the Jews of Kamieniec-Litewski. Jews from small shtetl left their homes and places of birth volunteerily before being told to move. They were looking for security or safety in numbers. Places like Linovo-Oranczyce, the rail way station twelve kilometers from Pruzany,

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some families from Malech, and Selce. From villages like Suchopole Popielewo, Szubicze and others.

To add to this multitude, five thousand Jews from Bialystok were in process of being shipped to Pruzany.

The expulsion of the few Chrisitian families and the huge influx, although involuntary of Jews, gave the impression that indeed Pruzany is being made into a Jewish town as the Germans claimed.

Entering Pruzany we went straight to my father
s sister Sheindl. There we found besides her and her husband Leibl, daughter Lisa and son Sioma, my grandparents Yaakov-Kopel and Chinka with their son Eli. They came from Drohyczyn a month earlier. To our surprise we found there my father's brother Hershl who came with his wife Sheina from Kamieniec-Litewski.

After spending at my aunt and uncle a couple of days, much talk, relting and listening, our relative advised us to come to Pruzany.

Having made our decision we left Pruzany on a Friday afternoon. Because of the muddy road it took us over three hours to cover the distance of the twelve kilometers. Arriving in Malecz just before dark.

My father had in Malech one more relative besides the two brothers Niselbaum. His name was Tzalkah (the baker). I do not remember his second name nor the relationship.

This tune we went there. He was indeed the local baker. A man of about sixty, lived with his wife alone in the house. I do not even know if they had children. In any case they lived alone in the house.

That Friday night his wife gave each of us a piece of Challah (a twisted white bread eaten on the Sabbath. It was the first time that I tasted Challah in over two years. As it is baked with wheat flour that was not available in our parts during the Bolshevics. Never mind the Germans. It turned out also to be the last time for the next four years.

We went to bed early, we tired from the long walk. The older people after a days work.

Apparently I slept well in a soft bed covered with a comforter, for when the first shot woke me it was just past five on the old clock on the wall. It seemed to me as if I just fell asleep.

We jumped out of bed and dressed in seconds. It was still dark outside but out of the still darker room I could see two men running with rifles in the hand shooting at random into the street.

The last two months in Chomsk have conditioned us for such a moment.

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Not loosing a second my father and I run to the door which opened with one kick, without slowing down crossed the street and somebodys yard, over a fence and we found ourselves in an open meadow. Just now we started to run in earnest, away from Malch. It was dawn and I could make out a few more running in the meadow. A few minutes later it was possible to tell who those people some fifty meters ahead of us were. My father panting said to me; this is the rabbi, his son and the "Shamas" (beadle) Still further to our right I noticed a girl that used to be my sister's classmate in gimnasium. Her name was Symah Pomeraniec.

Our only objective was to get away as fast and as far from the place from where all the shooting was coming and which is doomed to share its fate with Chomsk. Running I turned my head to see if we are being chased, I noticed several men behind the fence we just climbed. Their rifles resting on the fence firing in our direction. As I was turning back my head in the direction we were running, I glanced at the girl Symah who at that moment seemed to have lost her speed momentum and fell to the ground. My sincere prayer became even more pleading if it was at all possible that the bullets aiming at us should miss their target.

How far we ran or how long we could not tell, but in the confusion we lost sight of the others. When we finally stopped to catch our breath, Malch was a couple kilometers behind. We could still hear the shooting but not so continuously as before. In our imagination we could already see the Jews of Malch being driven to the slaughter. The only road left for us was Chomsk to my mother, sisters and brother.

From a distance we could see the winding road that leads from Chomsk to Malch which we, a few days earlier, used. Making it to the road we took I in the direction Chomsk.

After a couple of kilometers we encounter a tall farmer coming in our direction. When we came face to face with him he said in Yiddish, in a form of a question, Jews? We were taken a back, he noticed it and continued. I am a Jew too. I spent all my life in that nearby village. This morning Germans came to me and ordered me to leave everything behind and go to Malch. We told him what we saw this morning in Malch. But this only added to his confusion. Still he continued in the direction of Malch, not having where or to whom to turn. We could not understand that this Jew in his farmers attire and looks, went on to Malch. How said it is that a Jew who lived a lifetime among Christians could not in a time of need to turn to one for help.

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A little bit farther I noticed in the distance two Germans coming in our direction. Glancing at my father I saw that he was looking down at the road not to step into a deep puddle and did not notice yet the Germans. Few meters ahead to our right was a single homestead without a sign of life in the yard. I also notice d a well behind the house. Grabbing my father by the sleeve I pulled him off the road leading him behind the house at the same time telling him that I am very thirsty. From where we stood we could not see the road nor the passing by Germans.

Not wanting unneccesarily to worry my father I lowered the pail slowly into the well, bringing it back even at a lesser speed. Putting the pail on the rim of the well, I drank very slowly. Even when I could not drink any more I still held my face in the pail pretending to drink. My father finally asked me, how much can I drink? I only stopped pretending to drink when I felt that the Germans had passed the house.

After I talked to my father into taking a drink we emerged from behind the house onto the road. By then the Germans had not only passed the house, but were a nice distance away. I did not say anything to my father just nodded my head in their direction. My father said nothing, but I knew that he understood the reason of my act.

We did not lose time that day just kept on pludding on the muddy road towards Chomsk. There were a few villages on the way. Fearing that there might be Germans in there rounding up the single Jewish families living in the area, we used to inquire before entering a village. If there were, we used to go around them.

Before dark, we entered the village "Minky" knowing that there are no Germans or local police, we went to the village elder, telling him that we left Malecz this morning as many Germans arrived, not mentioning the shooting. The local farmers had, so far, heard nothing of it. The elder said that a couple local farmers have left this morning for Malech and are due back any moment, we can wait and find out if something is going on there.

Within half an hour, the farmers arrived. It seemed that they were ordered to leave Malecz immediately or were not even permitted to enter for they did not know much of what is going on there. All they said to us was: they are shooting ours and yours, but yours more.

The reason why some of the Melecz local non Jews people are being shot we understood. It was quite common in those days for the gentiles to start plundering the Jewish homes the moment Jews were being rounded up. The Germans wanting to have the first choice, could just as easily shoot Christians. Apparently the couple farmers did not know or did not

understand the reason for shooting Christians which upset them and spoiled the mooed of the villagers.

Where do we go in a dark and rainy October night? My father asked the elder if we could spend the night in the village. Here again he took us to a farmer where we spent the night on a hay covered floor.

We did not have any nightmares as we could not sleep after the experience of the day. The escape from Malecz, the fear of being shot, the tension of every step. Behind us, Malecz, is being masacred. The road to Pruzany is closed. We escaped for a moment with our lives, now trying to get to Chomsk. Death looms in every village where there are Germans or local police. And when we get to Chomsk, what then? For how long will Chomsk be left alone? Why?

Everybody was up before daylight. The farmer's wife gave us boiled potatoes with some milk. The rain stopped overnight and the road began to dry up, but most of our walk took place across fields and forests as we had to avoid the villages. About noon somewhere near a forest we stumbled on a single homestead. We entered the little house and asked for a piece of bread. The farmer's wife took out from a cupboard a crust of dry bread and handed it to us. As she did it , I noticed her looking critically at it. Realizing it meant nothing for two men, she went over a gain to the cupboard, took out a freshly baked bread slicing off another piece she gave it to us.

We left the house , my father holding the two pieces of bread. He looked at it and handed me the bigger piece which happened to be the fresh one. Without thinking I gulped it down. It was after I finished my piece that I looked at my father who was struggling with the piece of dry crust. I hated myself for being so thoughtless. But it was too late. I had eaten it.

In mid afternoon we entered a little village six kilometers before Chomsk. In another hour and a half we will be in Chomsk. Not that we had any good news nor were we safe in Chomsk, but after the last two days o be with the rest of the family. No matter for how long, to know that we are still here and together would be good.

Suddenly, from the few houses around appeared a few farmer's children with mocking faces yelling at us. Hey Jews! Where are you going, to Chomsk? There are no more Jews in Chomsk. They are all slaughtered.

The fact that Chomsk's Jewish community has been murdered and if the Nazis have don it once they can do it again with the Jews of Shershev compounded by the fact that we were running from what we assumed to be a slaughter in Malecz, it made sense that it could have happened in Chomsk at the same time.

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Here our entire world collapsed. We remained numb unable even to think and the village children jump around us with shouts and laughter.

Dimly aware of our action, we get out of the village, if only to escape the laughing children. A couple hundred meters from the village we stop. Alone the two of us in the world. We have nobody to go to. Nobody to come to. Why did we abandon them? To be with them in their final moments, to hold my little sisters hands at the edge of the ditch. Why did we have to go to Pruzany exactly now? Why did it have to happen? Why? G-d, in heaven why?

In the distance, from the direction of the village is approaching a farmer's horse and buggy. We don't want to hide. We don't want to talk to anybody.

The horse and buggy pull up. In it sits a farmer of about sixty, dressed like all farmers but cleaner and better fitting. With a friendly face and encouraging smile he offers us a ride. We wonder if he is making fun of us. He has such a good face and is an older man, why would he do it?

We tell him what we have just heard from the village children and that we were on our way to my mother and children. He listens with a serious but critical expression on his face. When we finish he says to us; I am a village elder from not a far away village, if something would have happened in Chomsk I would have known, the children are most likely referring to the original slaughter. Do not be afraid. Get on the wagon and let us get closer to Chomsk.

We had nothing to loose and got on. We started talking. He points at a sewing machine in his wagon and says: This was a Jewish machine, a friend of his plundered it from a Jewish home. He borrowed it from him as his wife needed to do some sewing. He expressed his sympathy with our plight. Thus listening to expression of compassion for the first time from Christian lips we entered Chomsk.

The little lanes were empty and quiet in Chomsk that dusk. We thanked the good Christian not knowing that our paths will soon cross again.

With great emotion and relief we greeted and hugged my mother and children.

The news about Malecz soon spread among the Jews of Shershev in Chomsk. But the desperate situation and hunger could not stop some from attempting to get to Pruzany. Within a week the events in Malecz became known to us. It turned out that the Germans came to Malecz to inform the local Jews that they are being transferred to Bereza-Kartuska, a shtetl some thirty kilometers away with a population of over three thousand Jews. True to Nazi tradition they came at an ungodly hour of the morning to assemable

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the local Jews in order to inform them of their intention, using the Nazi method of screaming and shooting in the air. The Malecz Jewish population knowing what the Nazis are capable of and what they have done to Jews in neighboring shtetls panicked. Some began to run for their lives like my fther and I. The Germans seeing Jews running away, no matter the reason, began to shoot them down. The local police did not need encouragement and followed suit.

It only stopped when the entire Jewish population was herded together in the center surrounded by the Germans. It was only then that they were informed that tomorrow Sunday, they are to move to Bereza-Kartuska.

Their crude and terrifying arrival has taken a couple dozen lives.

The next day the Malecz Jews left their centuries old homes. They were permitted to take with them a horse drawn buggy full of belongings. The Germans were so sure that the Jews will obey their orders that they did not bother to attend the transfer. A few families took the chance and moved to Pruzany instead of Bereza-kartuska. Among them my father's two cousins Joshua and Zalman Niselbaum with their families.

After our recovery from the experience of Malecz, my parents came to the conclusion that even in Pruzany we will to a great entent depend on help from the family, for whatever money my father and I had with us was taken from us during the march. The Germans took from the women too. The little money my mother succeeded in hiding from the Germans was insignificant, even though it was in U.S. dollars. The jewelry and gold coins was burried in Shershev. To come and get it was out of the question if even it was still there and not found by the local gentiles.

My parents came to the decision that we will remain in Chomsk for as long as the potatoes will last and then go to Pruzany.

Late fall is and always was a rainy season in our part of the world. That one was no exception. The mud in Chomsk street or alley was harder to put with than in Shershev. There at least the streets were cobblestoned and two of them had side walks. Chomsk had neither. To go to a neighbor was a problem was we had no proper footwear nor attire. So we used to sit on the only piece of furniture we had, a broken bench or on the hay on the floor in the dimly lit room. The only light used to come from the burning kindlings in the open door of the brick oven.

In the semi darkness of the room we could not notice the soot floating around in the air but in the morning in daylight, we could see each others black and full with soot nostrils. We, the grown ups used to be able to wash

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it out ourselves, but the little brother and sisters needed help. Poor dear sweet children.

We lived in one before the last occupied houses in the street. After it were few more unoccupied Jewish homes. Behind them were the two mass graves.

In the last occupied house lived Hertzka Kaminker with his family. It was eerie and weird to live in the last inhabited house and that Hertzka used to come often to us "to be among living people" as he used to say. During the day we used to come in to each others house, simply to escape the depressing atmosphere in the house only to find it in somebody elses.

People in desperation wanted by force to bring salvation by all sorts of rumors and even interpreting each others dreams. The circulating rumors were not encouraging, some well founded and some just rumors, like: in some places the Germans killed only the men. That was interpreted that the women are being left alone and safe. In other places was the opposite. In our desperate situation we failed to see the reality at which we stared every day, the two mass graves inwhich men, women and children, young and old lay shoulder to shoulder, without regard or compassion for sex or age.

Everyday brought its full quota of rumors that used to upset us to the limits already agitated nerves.

From all my friends at home all I had in Chomsk were the two brothers Rotenberg, with whom I used to spend a fair amount of time. In those days my friend Lazar, the older of the two brothers, the one that escaped during our march, decided at the age of twenty to marry a girl from Chomsk. She was one of the dozen young people that managed to save themselves from the slaughter.

To say that the wedding was a modest one would be greatly exaggerated. It took place without a rabbi, without kiddush (benediction over wine), just in the presence of two witnesses. The wedding was befitting the times.

With November came winds, cold and snow. Fortunately it was warm in the house. The previous owner provided himself ahead of time with wood for the winter, which he did not live to see.

In a November day I had to cut wood in the school yard for the school which was now attended only by Christian children, as the Jewish children were lying in the mass graves. The logs we had to saw and split outside and bring it in by the armful inside. As I was coming in to the school with an arms full of chunks of wood, I passed the corridor where the pupils coats were hanging. I froze to the floor. Only a Jew that grew up in our parts of the world would notice and understand it. There in front of me rack after

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rack were hanging Jewish childrens coats. Let me explain. Jewish children outer garments were different from the non Jewish farmer children ones. While the farmer coats were made of the home spun wool materila, the Jewish ones were made from manufactured yard goods. There, in front of me, every single coat was owned only a short time ago by a Jewish child. Now the true owners of those coats were decomposing in the ground, while the children of those who so diligently helped the Nazis in their atrocious and savage act, are wearing their victims clothing. Looking at those Jewish children coats, I wanted to scream: "not only did you murder, you have also plundered.' But what good is the cry, when they are the law, judge and enforcer?

The potatoes in the corner of the room were disappearing fast. My parents started talking about Pruzany in earnest.

But Pruzany is at the end of an over eighty odd kilometer frozen and now snow covered road, on which every few kilometers is a village in which there might be local police, Germans or both. For a Jew to be caught by either of them spelled death.

We can not delay the tip either, for the moment we finish the last pot full of potatoes will also be our last meal.

Exactly what day it was I do not know, I only know that it was in the second half of December when my mother boiled the last few potatoes dividing it among us. We put on all the clothing we had and with nothing to carry we left the house that sheltered us for three and a half months.

After covering a couple kilometers we reached a forest. Leaving the snow covered road we entered the forest and proceeded at the edge along the road under the trees that protected us from the falling snow. From a distance we noticed an approaching horse and buggy. When it came closer we recognized the same farmer, the village elder who gave us a lift to Chomsk when we were running from Malecz, the same that expressed so much sympathy and compassion for us Jews.

Seeing that friendly Christian we came out of the forest to greet him. He recognized us too. It led to a little conversation. As we were talking we noticed at a distance several Chomsk policemen on bicycles with rifles over their shoulders approaching in our direction. The village elder seeing them said as if to himself, what are they doing here, it is not even their territory? Turning to us he asked, did anybody see you leave Chomsk this morning? We said we did not know. He nodded his head knowingly and said; go on you way but stay close to the forest, and may G-d be with you. Giving a pull the reins he started out towards the approaching policemen.

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Behind the tree branches we watched what will happen. They met and a conversation ensued which lasted about ten minutes. We watched with relief as the policemen got on the bicycles and were going back to Chomsk.

It is possible that the policemen were after something that the village elder could help them with, so they turned back. It is also possible that a Chomsk local could have seen us leave and reported to the local police who did not want to miss a chance to dispose of a Jewish family by shooting them.

The truth of that coincident will never be known but I want to believe that the good Christian was sent to us at that moment as if from heaven.

At noon the weather changed. It cleared and turned frosty. The snow began to crackle under the feet. My two little sisters Sonia going on ten and Leiba not yet eight yet were struggling in the deep snow. So was my brother Leibl, barely eleven. Their little faces red from wind and cold, the eyes tearing from exposure to the hostile weather, holding on to my father's and mother's hands with their bare hands which did not give any sign of sensation. My father still had his worn by now winter coat. My mother was wrapped only in a shawl which was supposed to have protected her from that bitter wind and cold.

That sight pained me terribly. Yet I was trying to imagine how my parents felt. Especially my mother, who since I can remember was so protective of us.

We were forced every hour or so to knock on a door of a homestead that were by the roadside every several hundred meters. Out of compassion those ordinary farmers used to let us in to warm up. Some used to give even a piece of bread for the children.

Coming into one house that same afternoon, we must have presented a very pathetic picture, for the farmer and his wife started literally begging my parents to leave with them the three children. That is my brother Leil (Liova), my sister Sara (Sonia), and my sister Leiba. They were quite outspoken and said openly to my parents in those words: "You know what will eventually happen to you. With you, the children stand no chance, leave them with us. We will look after them as if they were our own."

We, that is my parents, my older sister Sheva and I knew that those people are telling the truth. But how do you do such a thing as to leave your own children, you own flesh and blood with total strangers at such a young age. How out of the blue do you tell your own children; Dear children, from today on you are no more ours, you will never see u nor hear from us again. These total strangers will from now on be your guardians. They will feed you and look after you for better or for worse.

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Can one imagine the scene when children start begging, pleading with parents not to be left behind with total strangers. Children that are telling parents that they would rather die with them than live without them.

On the other hand, who are those people? Is it a normal reaction of dcent people to a heart breaking scene that move them for a moment? What will be their reaction an hour or two later when they will realize that they have extra three mouths to feed? Will they still feel the same way or will their altruism evaporate?

On the other hand, in our hearts was still smoldering a spark of hope, no matter how vague or naïve, that we will be safer in Pruzany. Why then would the Germans go to the trouble of creating a Judenstadt Jewish town there?

As for me I could not have parted with my little brother and sisters. Looking at their tears swollen eyes for fear of having to remain I could not even dream of it I guess my parents felt the same way. We thanked the good people and left.

Before dark we got to a village and asked for the village elder. We asked him if he can put us up for the night. Apparently we must have been presenting a pathetic and sorry looking lot, for without a single question he took us to a farmer where we spent the night on the kitchen floor. The following day we again entered a couple farmers houses to warm up. In one we were again asked to leave the children behind. This time however, my parents did not hesitate to thank the good people, but gave a negative answer.

In the late afternoon we approached Malecz with great apprenhension. There were no more Jews in Malecz. Not my father's cousins Joshua and Zalman no Tzalka the baker. Nobody, not a single Jew to take you in. In fact, a Jew was not allowed to be found there. If even there were no Germans there was a local police force. To go around Malecz was out of the question. It was too late in the day. We would be stuck in open field deep in snow and perish for sure. Having no alternative we entered Malecz.

What we feared most, happened. As soon as we entered the street we came face to face with two local policemen. I can still see the smirks on their faces, as they were leading us to the police station. On their way most likely planning our exeuction.

Bringing us into the station they led us right into the office of the chief. I can also see the surprise on the policemens faces when they leading us in, saw the chief get up from his seat, stretch out his hand to my father with the words: Mr, Kantorowitz, how are you? We both recognized the chief of

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police we met at my father's cousin Joshua Niselbaum on our way to Pruzany in October.

The two policemen immediately changed their attitude towards us. Referring to us in their report and saying; We met these people (not Jews) in the street.

My father told the chief the reason for our being in Malecz and aked if he can find us a place to spend the night. The chief said that we will have to break up in two groups as we will be too many for one household. In between he mentioned that there is a man in Malecz whom we might now. My mother and children went one way and my father and I went to the one the chief said we might know. It was my former boss Pietrukiewicz, the manager of the Soviet warehouse I worked for a year.

We spent the night there. Reminiscing with him until late at night about the good times in Shershev.

In the morning we set out on our last leg to Pruzany. The crossing of the rail way track, the so called border, passes uneventfull. We meet no Germans on the border nor on the way to Pruzany. Nothing had changed in Pruzany since my father and I left it two months ago. We entered via Seltzer Street, where already the first houses were occupied by Jews.

Despite all the circumstantial difficulties in existance, Pruzany at that time was a safe haven not only for the local Jews but also for the Jews of the nearby shtetls as well as for individual Jews who miraculously managed to save themselves from the slaughter of their respective shtetls and succeeded in getting to Pruzany. Credit for the order and organization has to be given to the leadership of the community that followed the tradition of previous generations of leaders who guided the community with justice, compassion and honesty. That experience and devotion came in handy to the "Judenratt" (Jewish committee) in dealing with the Nazis until the final hour.

A day after our arrival the committee assigned us accomodations. It consisted of two small rooms and a kitchen that we had to share with two women who lived in the same small house. the two women, a mother nd daughter who was a teacher by profession were brought to Pruzany from Bialistok. My father's sister Shaindl and brother Joshua gave us a double bed, a couch, a table and a couple of chairs. We already had more than in Chomsk.

The house belonged to a Christian who had to vacate it as it was within the perimeter of the ghetto area.

The allotted bread per person was distributed under the supervision of the Judenrat (committee) at a minimal price. There were some destitutes who

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could not afford to pay anything. They used to receive their brad for free. Thus did the committee made sure that every inhabitant of the ghetto was provided with a roof over the head and a piece of bread.

For some unknown reason, Pruzany enjoyed certain privileges that no other shtetl in our district did. For example; the Germans reintroduced the so called market days. They used to take place every Monday and Thursday, when the farmers from the surrounding villages used to come to the city to sell their produce and buy other necessities. Those market days were a tradition older than many only could remember which the Bolshevics abolished. Now it started again, but not like it used to be. In the olden days the farmers could bring to the market anything they wanted to sell, then go to the stores, many of them Jewish and buy whatever they needed.

There were no more Jewish stores now. Still, some former store keepers managed to hold on to some of their merchandise and could barter now with the farmers. But mot of the local Jews used to barter some of the house items or their clothing for food.

The farmers too had restrictions of sorts. They were permitted to bring in potatoes, cabbage, beets and carrots. No meat, butter, eggs, cheese and alike. Yet some of it found its way into the ghetto via the sack of potatoes. Those who had what to barter with, had what to eat. All this was applicable to the local residents who so far, remained in their homes with their possessions. Here I want to point out that at that time the ghetto was as yet not fenced in and accessible in many ways. Thus keeping the food prices reasonable.

The late fall of 1941 was a tumuituous time in ghetto Pruzany. The Germans have just finished transporting five thousand Bialistok Jews in there. Unknown to the Germans, many on the quiet began to move back to Bialistock. The same happened with the Jews of Kamieniec-litewsky. Some of course remained, among them my uncle Hershl and his wife Sheina.

My uncle Hershl's reason for remaining were; the safety in numbers, his financial independence and the fact that Pruzany was incorporated in east Prussia, making us German citizens. Thus privileged Jews (how naïve). Not to mention the fact that his extended family was there like his parents, brothers and sister.

All this does not mean that local Jews knew no hunger. Here I am speaking of these who always lived hand to mouth, like the many Jewish tradesmen, artisans and even petty merchandise. The Jewish masses that had no savings or merchandise.

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However, as long as the ghetto remained open, Christians could get in and bring with them work in the form of raw material for the Jewish tradesmen. Jews could also get out to work in Christian homes.

Despite the tension and uncertainty life in the ghetto pulsated that late fall of 1941. There were still things and material to fullfill the German demands and when need be bribes. Everything was done to postpone the inevitable, hoping upon hope of a miracle.

Among others the Germans had a constant demand for workers. A certain group used to work for the Gendarmerie or as we used to call them "Schuz-Polizei" where work meant hell on earth. From there he men used to come home beaten and bloodied and had to be replaced almost daily. Another place used to be the Ortscommendantur where soldiers from the eastern front used to come for a rest. There were other establishments where physical labour was needed. Mnay used to go out daily to clean the street of snow. Mainly the main street Pacewicza that used to be a Jewish street. Now taken over by Germans and their colaborators.

For me, Pruzany was a change for the better. No more did I walk among the dead or walking dead like in Chomsk. Here I was among living who dared to hope.

In Pruzany I found two of my friends. One Kalman Kalbkoif, who lived with his parents and four sisters in one half of a former Christian house. In the other half lived a local Jewish couple by the name of Kotlar. The second friend Itzik Malecky too lived in the same little street called Rezky. He lived with his mother Breina, an older brother Nachum, a younger brother Moishe and a blind grandmother Yachna. Their father Pesach was shot on the march during our explusion from Shershev.

They too lived in a small former Christian house tht consisted of a meter wide and three meter long hallway and one 3x3 meter room that served as a living, dining, bed room and kitchen. The hallway besides protecting the entrance to the one room, also served as a storage room. In it they kept a little turf which the committee used to distribute to the needy refugees.

The turf us to be dug by a group that used to leave the ghetto early every morning. After a march of several kilometers to the peat hole, dig the turf and return to the ghetto after dark.

The work, any kind of work done for the Germans and their Polish fawns, (as many Poles returned with the Germans to where they lived before the Bolshevics) was done without any compensation. We were grateful if we got away without a beating.

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I must admit that despite my previous experience in Chomsk I still did not realize the importance of helping my father in providing the most elementary items for our survival. I use to leave it to my father, not wanting to assume the responsibility, taking it for granted that he will somehow manage.

Among the many regrets this is one for which I can not forgive myself even today. How could I have been so unfeeling as not to understand. So blind as not to see. After all, I was going on nineteen. Going out to work through the ghetto gate I used to get a quarter of a kilo of bread which I greedily used to eat up. I never stopped to think that maybe I should bring it back home. Coming back from work, my mother always had for me a piece of bread and a bowl of soup. I never thought of asking my mother how she managed it, or if she had eaten. True, I never saw my little brother and sister emaciated, but I remember my mother who was always a weighty woman slowly, loosing weight since our expulsion from Shershev. Why didn't I think of asking my mother or father if they had eaten, or are they going around hungry?

These are part of the thoughts that haunt me and gnaw at me today.

The feelings of regret and remorse that constantly gnaw at me, I will come back to later if time will be on my side.

The large influx of Jews into the ghetto had stopped but not completely. The difference was that now it was not done by the Germans but by Jews themselves. Now only single individuals or small family size groups used to come in. It was no more than a trickle. Those were Jews that managed to save themselves from their respective shtetls that were slaughtered. Wandering through fields and forests at night, hiding during the day, managed to avoid Germans and local police and made it to Pruzany.

Some Shershev families in Drohyczyn and Chomsk followed our example too and came to Pruzany in that winter 1941-42.

In one February cold day, the Gestapo, whose headquarter was in Biala-Podlask ordered the Judenrat (Jewish committee) to deliver five hundred Jews, preferrably entire families for deportation east. The meaning of such a deportation was no more a secret. The committee was given three days time to deliver those people. Otherwise, the Germans will do it themselves. Everyone in the ghetto knew that if the Germans will do it themselves, many more lives will be lost.

The committee was faced with a double task. One, if at all possible to annul the decree. The second, if not possible, who will it be? How do you tell someone, you and your family has to die?

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The time began to pass in tension, apprehension and outright fear. The out of towners or refugees knew that if a list for delivering the five hundred souls will be made, it would not be local but contain outsiders and we the outsiders were doubly concerned.

The committee tried hard to annul the decree. The intermidiary was Zalmen Segal, a member of the community, as he was called in the ghetto as the foreign minister. Born in Pruzany, he spent many years in Danzig. There he learned his German language and learned to deal with them. A tall man with a military gait, he looked very much German, and apparently understood their approach, psychology and attitude towards Jews. Maybe because of it he could at times anticipate their next move or intentions. Of course, it was all temporary, for at the end, they had outwitted us all.

At that moment, a couple hours before the deadline when the committee was supposed to have delivered five hundred Jews for the slaughter, it sounded like messianic times when a messenger sent by Zalmen Segal from the Gestapo bureau, where he was sitting that evening in difficult negotiations with the chief of the Gestapo, brought the news to the office of the commttee. It consisted of three words "it is good".

Although the full text of the negotiations became known only the next morning, the contents of the three words spread within minutes over the ghetto, despite the late hour.

It is my opinion that the day was the happiest in the short life in the ghetto Pruzany. When does a pauper rejoice? When he finds the nickel he has just lost.

The success of those negotiations could to a certain degree be accredited to two factors: the talent of the negotiator and the suseptability of the Gestapo big wigs to bribery. Sometimes money used to suffice, sometime leather boots and coats, fur coats for their wives, liquor and sometimes all of those things. It all depended on the severity of the decree.

From the refugees point of view, the locals that is the Jews of Pruzany proper, had it much better than they, the refugees. After all, the majority of the locals remained in their homes, with the furniture, bedding, clothes, dishes, cutlery and alike. They could always find something to barter, no matter how difficult it was to part with. The refugees on the other hand had nothing to sell, all their possessions were on their backs. Anything else was either given by relatives, by acquaintances, by a mercy full Jew or by the committee. To supplement their existance some tried different means like dabbling in anything they could find among the ghetto Jews and with Christians on market days.

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A few Shershev Jews living now in Pruzany used to sneak in at night into Shershev and try to collect things that they gave to their Christian neighbors for safe keeping, or simply to get some food by begging. Those who did not dare go to Shershev as it was life threatening, used to send messages via Shershev Christians to their Christian friends to come out to Pruzany on market days. Some used to ask their Christian confidants to dig up something in their previous yard or in their double caused walls and bring it out.

Of course in such cases there used to get involved a third partner, the Christian that was at that time living in the Jewish home. There were cases that something used to be gotten back. Even a third was better than none. But most of the time those attempts used to be futile. As soon as the Jews have left the shtetl, the local gentiles threw themselves at the Jewish possessions. When that was plundered, the searches started in the yards and ground.

Hardly anything escaped detection and if something did, the new people that moved in the Jewish homes continued the search. There were cases when the so called confidants used to share it with the new tenants, forgetting the true owner.

My father did succeed in recovering some leather which we hid in the double floor of our house. He did it with the help of the nurse's husband, when the couple lived in our house before the war. At the time when half of our house was serving as a health clinic. After dividing it in three parts, ther was not much left.

Some weeks later my father asked the same man to get several pairs of new shoes we had hidden in another place. The man came back claiming that there were none to be found. It is possible that hose shoes were found before the new people moved in, it is also possible that those people found it, or…

In any case, this was our last attempt to recover anything hidden in our house or yard. And to think how handy those things would have come in.

Throughout the winter the trickle of Jewish refugees kept on coming into the ghetto. Among them those Shershev families that were really starving. Having no other choice they were compelled at the risk of their lives to get to Pruzany where despite difficulties they were welcomed. The allotted bread and potato ration could not fill ones stomach and those who could not or were not able to supplement extra food, were at times forced to stretch out a hand which was never sent back empty.

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Some refugees, most of them from Shershev, took awful chances in order not to become a burden on the committee or anyone else.

There were some Shershev men that used to go on foot, a distance of one hundred kilometer to Drohyczyn. They carried in knapsacks, saccharine and exchanged it in Drohyczyn for tobacco. A couple of them even procured a horse and sled for this purpose.

The Christians along the villages they used to pass soon found out and started to ambush them, taking away the merchandise horse and sled. Having no other alternative those men had to go on foot by a different route every time. In such a way some needy Shershev families survived the winter.

I, not being even a partial provider for our family, maybe because of immaturity or maybe because life did not demand it of me until those difficult times, left it to my father. When I think of it, I realize that I don't know what my father did all that time when I was at work out of the ghetto. Nor do I really know to what extent my uncles and aunts helped us. That they helped us this I know, especially my father's sister Sheindl.

It is quite possible that my father dabbled a bit in petty items. It is also possible that my mother did succeed in hiding some valuables from the Germans during our expulsion. To these questions, I will never have an answer.

Shortly before Passover of the spring 1942, the Germans decided to reduce the size of the ghetto. It might have been under pressure from some local Christians whose houses were incorporated into the ghetto. We, living in that area had to move out. We were asigned a room on Nowa Street. It was a big house belonging to a tailor by the name of Berl Cukerman. One room in that house already occupied by a young intelligent couple from Bialistok by the name of Eisenshtein. The husband was the assistant chief of the ghetto police. Always busy at his job, his wife used to come into our room for chat with my mother.

The room we were given was small, especially for seven of us. My sister Sheva had to move to my uncle Joshua and family who lived on the same street a few houses away.

The owner of the house looked to be close to sixty. A bit bent over from spending a life time over a sewing machine. A socialist by conviction and like many old time idealists well informed about politics. A worthy and formidable opponent in a discussion, that used to get easily excited. His wife was the exact opposite, a quiet easy going ordinary woman. Their oldest daughter in her twenties recently married in the ghetto to a refugee from

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Bialistok. A handsome, like a movie star young man, who most probably married her in order to have a home. He sure deserved someone much better.

Here we were in the heart of the Jewish part of Pruzany. Our street the middle of three parallel running streets; Pozarna, our street Nova and Yatka Street. Streets and alleys where Jews could move about out of sight from prying German eyes.

At that time the Germans had a better idea of how many Jews are there in the ghetto and so did the committee. With spring the demand for out of the ghetto workers had increased and dodging it became difficult. I had to appear now every day to be assigned to different tasks.

Around Pruzany the Soviets started building two military airports. To do that work they not only employed local people, but they had also brought in a couple thousand convicts, or forced laborers as they called them, from deep in the Soviet Union. To house those convicts they built a row of wooden barracks. The convicts succeeded in building several two story brick buildings, accomodations for the military, before the Bolshevics abandoned everything and ran. Now, under the Germans, their Schutz Polizei moved in the brick buildings. They decided to dismantle the wooden barracks and a large group used to go out from the ghetto to do the job.

The work could have progressed nicely, quietly and quickly, but the Schutz Polizei lived in the nearby brick buildings and they liked t come over to have some fun with the Jews. The work became a torture chamber.

The barracks were built on a sandy ground. The main support of the barracks were the heavy posts dug into the ground. After dismantling the roof and the wall, they heavy posts had to come out of the ground.

I noticed a German supervising a small group of men digging out a post. He ordered them to dig around the post and let it fall which ever direction. When the post fell half way he ordered them to pull it out of the hole. It was never an easy job, but this one got jammed in its own hole and would not budge. The German was standing over them with a heavy club beating them continuously.

I do not know where I suddenly got the nerve to do it. Running over to the being beaten group, I pushed them aside. Jumping into the hole I quickly dug to one side of the hole, ‚jumped out and pushed the post in that direction. Giving a nod to two more men we put our hands around the post and pulled it out.

Without stopping to straighten my back and fearing the Germans reaction to my intervention, I ran to the next post, quickly digging a narrow, two shovels wide ditch in one side of the post. I pushed the post in that direction.

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The post fell promptly in the intended path. With a couple more men we quickly pulled the post out.

It was only then that I chanced to take a look at the German. To my surprise he was looking at me approvingly.

The group around soon caught on and started doing it my way to avoid further beatings. The German comes over to me, sticking the stick in my hand and says; You take care of them. As soon as he turned away I let the stick slide from my hand. He noticed it, coming over he picked up the club, while I was getting ready to receive a god threshing. Instead he simply handed it to me without a word. Again as soon as he turned away I let it out of my hand. He noticed it again, but did not come over, making a sign of resignation he turned and walked away.

I believed then and still believe now, that on that day I saved some of my coworkers from a lot of blows, and proud of myself for daring to throw the stick away.

The next day I was assigned to another task at dismantling the barracks. The Schutz Polizei showed up too. I could never understand why, ws it sheer idleness, was it for amusement or was it plain sadism that they used to come to torture us.

Within two weeks we finished that job and again I began to work each day at another place.

There were two jails in Pruzany from way back. One was built of bricks and referred to as the red jail. The other one was covered with plaster and called the white one. It served the purpose of a jail for many years. Under the Bolshevics those two jails served mostly as holding places for criminal offenders as well as political ones. From there they were sent to Siberia.

Under the Germans, those two jails too served as a gathering point from where the arrested were being dealt with in the Nazi manner. That is, to say were sent to their eternal rest. Those arrested, undesirables of the Nazi state consisted of former Soviet collaborators, communists, employs of the Bolshevic party, militia members, Soviet sympathizers and suspected sympathizers.

When in spring of 1942 the activities of the pro Soviet partisans increased, they and their sympathizers, supporters in any way fell in that undesirable category. They used to be arrested. The Germans did not need nor did they look for any proof. All they needed was a name.

It turned into a time to even old scores. A time of revenge, settling old missunderstanding, rivalry and resentments. All one needed was to go to the

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Germans and tell them that such and such supports partisans. Within twenty four hours that person used to be arrested and brought in one of the two jails.

The above was applicable mostly to the non Jews. It was a time for the villagers, the farmers, to fear each other and mistrust one another. The jails used to fill up quickly. In order to make room for new arrested the old ones had to be disposed of. For this purpose a couple Gestapo men jsed to arrive from Biala-Podlask to look over the cases of the detained. The decision was a simple one guilty or not. There was no room for uncertainties.

There was no interrogation, no hearing. It all depended on the whim of the Gestapo representative. As a rule almost the entire jails used to be emptied after such a Gestapo visit.

Between Pruzany and its railway station Oranczyce was a birch forest, surrounded by a sandy terrain overgrown in spots with bushes. Near those bushes the Germans decided to make a resting place for all those condemned.

First, a mass grave had to be prepared and it was the Jewish committee that had to send diggers. Thus the ghetto used to be forewarned about the impending execution. Not only this but also the number of people that will be shot. It depended on the size of the grave.

The Nazis had a prescribed measure as follows: the hole had to be five meters wide and two and a half meters deep. The length depended on the number of people to be executed. Each four meters represented fifty human beings. That s to say that if the mass grave was twelve meters long it meant one hundred and fifty souls. If sixteen meters long, it represented two hundred.

That hole had to be dug a couple day before the execution. On the day of the execution a group of thirty men at six in the morning had to be waiting there for the burial. A distance of an hour and a half from the ghetto.

Of course nobody wanted to volunteer for this job, but as it occurred on the average once a month, many got caught. In one of those spring morning, it was my ill luck to get caught in that group.

In the morning as each group used to march out of the ghetto it was lead by a so called group leader. Among them was one by the name of Berl Buchalter whose job it was to lead the groups to dig those mass graves and a day or two later to cover the victims.

I was informed the night before to report to work much earlier, as we had to be at the grave side at six. As we left the ghetto we received a quarter of a kilo bread and marched away to our destination. After the six kilometer march we turned off the road for a short distance.

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On a large sandy uneven clearing there was the hole dug in a sandy soil Judging by its length of about twelve meters, translated into the execution of one hundred and fifty human beings. From the top to the bottom of the hole were steps dug in the sandy ground. Apparently it must have rained at night, for the steps were partly washed away, which the leader of the group told us to correct. While we were busy fixing the earthern steps a gendarme or a Schutz Polizei man pulled up on a motorcycle. He inspected our work at the same time giving our foreman some instructions. As soon as we finished our work the German told us to get behind the bushes some fifty meters away and not to look in the direction of the ditch. Berl our foreman, turns to us and says: Fellows, if you have something to eat do it now. For later you will not feel like it. We took his advise and ate our bread.

We did not have to wait long. We heard approaching vehicles. Not being able to conquer our inquisitiveness, we looked through the bushes. Half a dozen of the same Shutz Polizei arrived on motorcycles, taking up positions around the hole some twenty meters from its edge. Behind them pulled up a jeep like vehicle with four men of higher rank, judging by the conduct of the gendarmes Followed by three fully covered trucks. At the end another vehicle arrived with a dozen or so gendarmes who took up positions around the trucks including the hole.

Looking from behind the bushes although hiding from the Germans, we could clearly see one truck backing up almost to the rim of the hole. Two Germans opened the back half door of the truck that feel downwards, while the upper part of the back of the truck remained covered with the tarpaulin obscuring the view for the standing inside people. The Germans started yelling Raus (Out) and the people started jumping to the ground and being driven down into the hole using the earthen steps which we fixed up an hour earlier.

As soon as the first truck was empty the second and third follow one after another. The trucks pulled away and the Germans got closer to the rim, but not too close. We noticed tht some of them threw something in the hole. A second or two later we heard explosions. Those are grenades Berl Buchalter whispered to us.Frankly, I thought that grenades make a louder bang when they explode. This was no louder than a rifle shot from up close.

Right after the explosion the Germans approached the hole right to its rim and began to shoot into it. We understood that they are finishing off the ones that survived the explosions. They made sure that nobody is alive, for they hang around the pit several more minutes firing in it from time to time.

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Finally some of them picked up the shovels we left near the pit and started filling it in. Their shoveling lasted a minute or two. Dropping the shovels they got into the vehicles and into the motorcycles and pulled away, leaving behind the one that came first.

That one yelled at us to come over. This time we did not walk but run. I did not know what to expect running towards the hole, but for a minute I was thankfull to the Germans for throwing the few shovels of sand over the slaughtered bodies.

The hole that was two and a half meters deep was now one and a half, the other meter was taken up by the just murdered mass of humanity whose faces and torn bodies lay under a thin layer of sand just thrown by the murderers themselves.

Each of us grabbed a shovel and started shoveling the sand into the pit. I noticed that some of the sand was beginning to change color, absorbing blood. A terrible thought came to me: If so much blood is being absorbed by the sand on top, what must it be like down below?

We were faster than the blood absorbing sand, and soon all traces of the blood was covered with freshly hipped sand except for the splattered spots on the walls of the not yet full mass grave.

Apparently the German was satisfied with our progress. He got on the motorcycle and drove away. For the first time we straightened our backs and tried to relax our nerves. Despite the fact that we wanted to get away from there as soon as we could, we had to stop to collect our thoughts.

We noticed that even though almost half the pit was taken up with bodies, there was not enough sand to fill in the hole. Was it possible that the rain that fell the night before washed away so much sand?

We had to scrounge around for pieces of wood even tree stumps to fill up the grave.

That day we started out early and got home early too.

A day or two later I was assigned to a group of close to a hundred men, whose job it was to dispose of undetonated Soviet bombs.

Here we had to go some five six kilometers in one direction on an unfinished railway embankment built by the Soviets. From there a field road led in to a forest where we saw three huge craters each about seventy five meters in diameter. How deep those craters were I could not tell, as they were fill up with water up to ten meters below the rim. To my question on the meaning of those craters, the leader or foreman told me that there were three large Soviet warehouses, full with aviation bombs that the Soviets blew up before they drew back or shall I say before they ran away, on the first day

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of the war. I recalled the three tremendous explosions I heard in Shershev that memorable Sunday night of June 22\41.

Not all the bombs however exploded in those three explosions. Many were thrown unexploded over a radius of a kilometer all over the forest with the bombs were also thrown around many detonators. There were four sizes of bombs; fifty, one hundred, two hundred and fifty and five hundred kilograms.

The two German airforce men that were waiting for us ordered us to collect the strewn around bombs and stock them up in approximately fifty ton piles. While they were primming them, we were running to the nearest farmstead half a kilometer away. The air men used to light a delayed action fuse giving them enough time to run to a previously prepared shelter. After the explosion we had to run back and start collecting more bombs.

The work was not only dangerous but very hard. The fifty kilogram bombs we carried on our shoulders. the one hundred one was carried y two men on two hammered together boards and the two hundred and fifty plus the five hundred ones we had to load on a horse drawn buggy. But even a fifty kilogram bomb to carry on a shoulder several hundred meters in a thick forest all day is no easy task. The two Germans although serving in the airforce were very willing to use thier sticks generously. One of them a non commissioned officer carried with him a "Schmeiser" (German submachine gun). At midday they were both warm from yelling and hitting us, the non comm suddenly points at me and in a loud voice says: You come here. Was wondering as to what have I done now. The German takes off his machine gun puts it over my shoulder and says; Take care of it, now go to the shelter where w keep the explosives, timers and detonators. The shelter was part of the ditch at the main road that was covered with branches and earth dumped on top. I went over there and spent the afternoon walking back and forth along the ditch. Compared to the others I got off easy that day. The only annoyance were the swarms of flies that kept on biting.

The next morning going to work I yearned for the yesterday when I got off so easily. To my surprise as soon as we got there, the non comm recognized me right away and motioned to me to come over. This time he gave me his weapon in my hand and motioned with his head in the direction of the shelter. I was wondering if he will give me the three long bullet magazines he kept on his belt. He never did.

The next day I already knew my place. As I was walking back and forth on the road, I was wondering what are the farmers thinking, seeing a young

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Jew, (as I had a big yellow stars on the front and back of my shirt) walking back and forth without fear nor without interest in them.

Going to and back from work, we used to talk among ourselves about the number of bombs the Germans are now destroying, about the loss and waste of material and what's more the effort and toil that was put in producing all this that is being now so easily destroyed by the accursed Nazis. We were talking of the thousands o innocent Soviet citizens that languished in jails, in mines and workcamps to produce it all. So that first the Soviets themselves could blow it up and the rest we are forced to do and all without the loss of a single life of a Nazi.

In between being shifted from one to another job I used to get away with a day or two staying home. In those off days, and on Sundays, I used to spend a fair amount of time with my two friends Kalman Kalbkof and Itzik Maletzky. Even on work days and the days were getting long, after work coming into our room, my mother had always had something for me to eat. I used to sit down to eat not having the consideration to ask her if she had already eaten or anybody else in the family for this matter. After eating, I used to lie down for an hour and then go to meet my friends. It was only later, after I had lost them that I began to regret my actions.

With my friends the topic of our conversation was about rumors of German defeats and new slaughters of Jews.

Unfortunately, the slaughter of Jews was always proven to be correct. While the rumors of German defeats wrong. For the Germans have just started their summer offensive that took them to the gates of Stalingrad.

That early summer the Germans decided to fence in the ghetto and I happened to be one of many to do the fencing. First we had to dig posts and then fasten on them a net of barbed wire.

I happened to work on a stretch of fence behind Rezky Street, where there was a large meadow. Our foreman said: Look fellows, there is now nobody to supervise. Lets take in a bit more of the meadow so that the ghetto children will have where to play. We did. When the fence was erected and the German commission came to inspect it, they decided that the ghetto had too much space. They ordered to move the fence right behind the streets houses, depriving the ghetto of the only bit of green grass and empty space. It was also my task to take down the fence and move to wherever the Germans wanted.

The committee was informed that the Germans are planning to create a work camp near Bialowieza, fifty kilometers from Pruzany. It was required of them to deliver two hundred able bodied men.

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To go out daily from the ghetto to work for the Germans and come back at night is one thing, but to be away for a month or two under the constant supervision of the Schutz Polizei is something else. Understandably, nobody wanted to go.

As the style was in all other ghettos, so to in a smaller degree in Pruzany. To all unpleasant places the committees used to relegate the refugees. Again I am emphasizing, to a smaller degree, it was in Pruzany.

For this purpose the ghetto committee appointed representatives from all the shtetls that were brought in or came voluntarily to Pruzany. From Shershev they appointed my grandfather, Yaakov-Kopel Now the committee called a meeting of all the representative demanding from them names of people to be sent to that camp.

After hearing their demand my grandfather told them: I can give you only one name. He gave them the name of his youngest son, my uncle Eli. The only unmarried son, nine years my senior.

I do not know if it was spitefulness or maybe helplessness that they did put my uncle Eli's name on top of the list and he was sent to the Bialowiez camp. The camp or rather the couple barracks they slept in was several kilometers away from Bialowieza in the depth of that ancient forest. During the day the Schutz Polizei used to supervise them, but before dark the Germans used to get back to Bialowieza, fearing the partisans that were operating in the forest. And indeed they used to be visited by partisans at night quite often. It was the partisans visits that became the stimulus for a partisant movement in the ghetto.

During the two months of the camps existence, the workers that used to get sick from over work or even due to the beating by the police, used to be sent back to the ghetto and replaced by others.

Here I would like to emphasize the effort of the leadership of the ghetto to insure the safety and lives of the inmates of that camp. For when the work was finished all the two hundred men returned safely to the ghetto. One of the rare cases where Jews returned home after a stint in a German camp. As a rule, after finishing their task they used to be shot or sent to other camps, if lucky. Again I would like to stress the fact that the Juden-Rat, or committee did everything in their power to ease the conditions in that camp. With the help of bribes they used to send out several horse drawn wagons with food weekly and when it was necessary, even with a German escort. No wonder that when those two hundred men returned, they had nothing but praise for the committee.

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That spring of 1942 a couple more Shershev families succeeded in making their way from Drohyczyn and Chomsk to Pruzany. They were driven by hunger and fear. With the warm weather, the killing of Jews by the Nazi squad and their helpers intensified. Those newcomers used to bring news from all the shtetls where Shershev Jews were dispersed, like Drohyczyn, Chomsk, Antopol, Iwanowo, Janow and neighoring shtetls. The news was always depressing and what's worse, shocking.

We, in Pruzany used to wonder as to how long our luck will hold. As in every place and at any time there were also in Pruzany, foolish optimists that used to find all kinds of reasons and merits for the Germans to leave us alone. They used to justify their argument by fact that the Germans opened a tannery where a good quality leather was produced which the Germans, especially the Gestapo craved so, or that in the ghetto is being opened a workshop in which several dozen Jews will be working at sewing leather around felt boots to be sent for the army on the Soviet front. After all, there was no secret that the German army suffered from the bitter cold on the Russian front last winter and to those naïve optimists, there was no question that the Germans saw their solution to this problem in the couple dozen Jews sewing on leather on the felt boots.

In the category of such optimist belonged only a few local men, but many more women, or rather housewives to whom the very mention of the work slaughter was criminal. Although from a psychological point of view and with hind sight we can now rationalize the reason.

The does not mean that the Jews of Pruzany were so naïve or foolish to believe that they will be spared the fate of other Jewish committies. To the contrary, Pruzany and many intelligent, realistic and lucid Jews who were active not only in the Juden-Rat (committee) but in all other social and communal organizations that functioned in the ghetto. Maybe they felt that this was all that could be done, after all, they have managed so far to steer the ghetto clear of catastrophe, in fact unscathed. While all around the Jewish communities have disappeared from the face of the earth. Everyday that we survived brought us closer to allied victory.

For us refugees who have already tasted real Nazi atrocities, the future was very bleak. All we cold hope for was a miracle that refused to happen.

If in winter and early spring a few Shershev Jews succeeded to make it from Pruzany to Drohyczyn and back, it became practically impossible in summer. The human anima had tasted Jewish blood and realized that it is wanton, worthless, unprotected and cheap. At time even rewarding to betray, so it started doing it. A Jew on the road cold be stopped by a couple or

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several villagers who used to take everything from him and hand him over to the Germans or local police. They in return used to make that Jew dig his own grave before shooting him.

Some villagers used to satisfy themselves with robbing the Jew and letting him go. Rare was the case when a villager did not rob him and even rarer when a villager let him in for over night and gave him something to eat.

That late spring of 1942 we found out from a Shershev Jew that made it from Drohyczyn to Pruzany, that the Germans requested from the Drohyczyn committee two hundred men for a labour camp. All usual in such cases, the Drohyczyn committee picked the outsiders, in this case, the ones from Shershev. Before taking the local single men they took among the first many married men from Shershev. One of those taken was my father's brother Reuven who left behind in Drohyczyn his wife Chaskha, a daughter Michla, two years my junior, a son Shalom a year older than my brother Liova, and a son Shevach, age five. My aunt Chashka remained alone to fend for herself and her three children.

The two hundred men were led away from Drohyczyn, never to be seen or heard from again. Peasants from nearby villages told some Jews of Drohyczyn that they saw those men being led into a nearby forest and killed.

From those scarce wanderer we were told that those ghettos are being divided into two separate ones. They would be called ghetto "A" and ghetto "B". In the ghetto "A" will be the members of the committee, the ghetto police, employs of the committee. All those needed for the functioning of the ghetto and all those employed by the Germans and their cronies. All others will be living in ghetto "B", qualified as unproductive and thus not needed.

If ever Jews in their long history of persecution did not need division of any kind it was in those days. The Germans understood it perfectly and took advantage of it to the fullest. They succeeded in turning Jew against Jew. Life long friends became embittered enemies. Everyone understood that the first victims in case of a Nazi conducted slaughter will be those in ghetto "B". Everybody wanted to get in there and the Germans ordered the ghettos to be divided in two even parts. It was like a drowning passenger boat that has not got enough life boats.

How the committees succeeded in carrying out is in itself a wonder. A big part in its execution played the fact that the Germans threatened to do it themselves, which nobody wanted, knowing that it would end with the obliteration of the entire ghetto.

After the division of the ghettos, the inhabitants of the ghetto "B" knew that it is only a matter of time before the Germans will come for them. The

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Jews of Shershev that were living in those shtetls found themselves mostly in the ghetto "B", due to their status as refugees. Having nothing to loose, tried to get out of the ghetto to make their way to Pruzany. They of course put their lives in immediate danger, whether by getting out or by being caught on the way.

How many Shershev Jews left their ghettos to make it to Pruzany, nobody will ever know. Most of the were caught by the local, so called Ukrainian police and shot. A few made it.

It was from one that made it that we found out that my aunt, my uncle Reuven's wife and three children were let into ghetto "A" as compensation for her husband that was one of the two hundred men that were taken earlier supposedly to work, but were shot in the nearby forest.

Pruzany as a whole, including the ghetto was at that time administrated by a nazi party member. He held the title "Birgermeister" (mayor). There was also an "Orts commendanture", a military command that dealt exclusively with military affairs. Its quarters were in the former Polish "Monopoluwka" (Monopol office). It was a fenced in yard containing several brick buildings on Pocztowa Street, that lead to Pacewicza or "Neghydishe Gass" (Rich Man's) as it was called in the old days. It was also the main street in Pruzany.

In the Orts commendanture, beside the administration, the bulk of the buildings were taken up by members of the regular army. Those were soldiers that used to come from the front for a week or two rest.

Those soldiers did require service and what could be better than unpaid Jewish help?

So a group of Jews used to go there daily to put things in order. At the beginning a large group. As things began to fall in lace, the rooms equipped with iron beds, with cupboards, table and chairs, less and less help was needed. In the end all they employed were six men. I became one of them. Our work consisted of sawing splitting wood, pumping water for the buildings up to a water tower, peeling potatoes for the kitchen, even to scour the large cooking kettles.

Nobody was eager to work there. There were too many Germans around, too many eyes watching. I never cheated on work, as long as they did not beat us, I did not mind them watching. So I remained there.

"When you chop wood splinters fall," goes a saying. With us, it became literally. We made ourselves primitive knapsacks in which we used to put in a few chips of wood. Not being stopped at the exit of the Ortskommendanture at which two soldiers were constantly on guard and not

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being beaten at the ghetto gate for a few chips of wood, we began to fill our knapsacks more.

Not withstanding the insignificance of a piece of wood at present, it meant a lot more in the ghetto. To us it meant that my father did not have to walk along the street to his sister and carry back a few chunks of wood in a bag. At least we became independent as far as wood is concerned. When I used to come home from work to see my mother heating up some soup for me with the wood chips I brought the day before, I felt that I am contributing something and wished I could do more.

At work, after the noon meal cooked, the Germans soldiers used to give us the large kettles to clean. As a rule there was something left in them. After having part of it, as we used to divide it among us six, I used to have twings of conscience for having eaten the piece of bread I got at the exit from the ghetto. After all, I could have saved it and brought it home.

Twice we had successful days. Once they were cooking "bacalla." This is salted and dried cod fish. It has to be soaked in water for a time before cooking. The smell is unpleasant during and after cooking. Many soldiers would not eat it, so the six of us had some to take home.

The second lucky day was when a couple of farmers brought a wooden barrel full of fresh milk and left it uncovered in the middle of the yard. Nobody bothered with it and after a couple hours it turned sour. We were told to move it behind some distant buildings. Before going home we looked in it and noticed a transparent liquid on top and a white cheese like substance on the bottom. Pouring out the water, we emptied the white substance in our knapsacks which served for a while as a sieve. We forced the water ourt as much as possible, took the knapsacks on our back and carried it into the ghetto.

The exit and entry into our ghetto was less restricted than in ghettos I was told about or read about. By mutual agreement with the Germans, the ghetto committee could and did issue a permit to any Jews to leave and come into the ghetto. As a rule groups leaving the ghetto were accompanied by a ghetto leader or foreman called a "Column-leader." He carried a permit stating the amount of people he had with him. In our case six men did not warrant a column leader, so we received individual permits. It meant that each of us could get our or into the ghetto at will. Still we preferred to enter as a group, by it hoping due to the number to discourage the Germans at the gate from searching. Our knapsacks were not always completely innocent. Working around in a kitchen we used to succeed at times to put a couple raw potatoes

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in our pocket. Sometimes a carrot or a beet. We used to bring it in under the wood chips.

That does not mean that the Germans did not conduct searched at the ghetto gates. It is just that we were lucky.

There were often extensive searches conducted not only by the police, the so called Schutz Polizei, but by a group of soldiers attached to communication that were stationed in Pruzany. The name of the officer in charge was Lehiman and they were referred to in the ghetto as the Lehiman gang. They were not satisfied with beating up Jews outside the ghetto, but liked to come in and beat up anyone at random.

They, together with the Schutz Polizei used to stop entire columns on the ways to the ghetto, lead them into a yard and order them to get undressed, looking for any excuse. Woe to the one who even had one potato on him.

At the gate of the Ortscommendantur, where the guard stood, the Germans affixed a bill board on which they used to attach in the morning a couple daily news papers. Before going in or on our way out we used go glance quickly at it. The headlines proclaimed their victories, telling of the new conquest, giving numbers of prisoners that ran in the hundreds of thousands and their imminent taking of Stalingrad.

We knew that some reports and some numbers are abit inflated, but we also knew that the Germans are in the middle of their 1942 summer offensive and are advancing deeper into the Soviet Union.

In May of 1942 a Pruzany gentile got in touch with my uncle Leibl Pinsky and handed him a letter from his brother Hershl who lived in Warsaw. I mentioned him much earlier in my memories of 1929. He was the one that secretly crossed the Soviet Polish border and came to his sister Chashka and his birth place Shershev. He left Shershev for Warsaw shortly after and went into trucking business.

In the letter he offered his brother financial aid via that Christian family. In fact he managed twice to send over a few dollars before July that summer, before the annihilation of the Warsaw ghetto began. At which time their contact ceased. I can only assume that Hershl met his end in the gas chambers of Treblinka where the entire four hundred thousand Jews of Warsaw ghetto were put to death. His brother, my uncle Leibl and family perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz six months later. To this event, I will come back later.

Many of those long summer evenings I spent with my friend Kalman Kalbkoif at our friend's Itzik Maletzky in that small one room house where other young men from Shershev used to gather. Besides the news from the

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front and the constant slaughter of ews, a new topic arouse. The question of partisans. By that time there were in Pruzany a few single men, formerly from Shershev and others from neighboring towns who left their families, parents, sisters, brothers, young siblings and came to Pruzany, the imaginary safe heaven.

Only a single young person could undertake such a journey. It was sated with danger. The passing through or even around unfriendly villages and avoiding the local, so called Ukrainian police took youthful strength, agility and courage.

Among those that used to gather at the Maletzkys, were two friends of Itzik Maletzky's older brother Nochum's friends; Shloime Zubatzky and Yekutial Wapenshtein. They have left their families in Chomsk and made their way to Pruzany. It was they who brought me the news that my close friend Laizer Rotenberg, who married the previous fall in Chomsk became a father.

We used to gather at the Maletzkys as that small place or rather their little one room house offered us complete privacy, which none of us so called refugees had.

Our conversation were down to earth, but at times led more to like "wishful thinking" than reality. It used to alleviate our strained nerves from the hopeless realities for a moment.

If during those moments of hope we could not being overnight the Red Army to us, we spoke of joining the partisans in the forests. When during such a conversation , I asked the few young men that came to Pruzany by themselves, why don't they go into the forest? They answered that if I will join them, they will go. Here I want to point out that I was the youngest among them, that they were all older than I by anywhere from one year to three. To my argument that I still have in the ghetto my parents, sisters and brother, not to mention other relatives while they had nobody here to leave behind. They responded that most likely I know that it is safe to remain in the ghetto for the time being. It dawned on me that because my grandfather was officially representing Shershev in the committee, I know more than they. How foolish and naïve we all were.....

The railway station Oranczyce that serviced the entire district of Pruzany was twelve kilometers away. Next to it was the village of Linowo, in which a few dozen Jewish families lived. Being so close to Pruzany, some of the families intermarried with members of the Pruzany community. With the entry of the Germans, a handful of those families moved to Pruzany. They

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too were looking for safety in numbers. The large majority however, remained in place hoping to outride the German onslaught at home.

Groups of Jewish men used to go daily from Pruzany ghetto to work at the railway station carrying news in either direction. On a July day when a group returned from that Linowo Oranczyce station they brought the said news about that morning slaughter of the entire Jewish populatin of Linowo. The village was surrounded early that morning. The Nazis went from house to house with a list of inhabitants. After collecting the entire Jewish population they were taken to the nearby petrol depot, built two years earlier by the Bolshevics and was surrounded by a barb wire fence. In that enclosure, in small groups they were lined p at the edge of a prepared hole and shot. Due to the geographical nearness and the close relation that Pruzany had with Linowo, that news made a shocking and lasting impression on the Pruzany community. The out pouring of grief surpassed the combined sadness and loss that Pruzany had shown to all other communities slaughtered this far. This event was too close a call to home. It gave the impetus for young men to think seriously of going into forests and joining the partisans.

That summer the activities of some partisan groups became quite daring. Their exaggerated heroic deeds assumed legendary proportions among the villagers and even more so among the closed in Jews of the ghetto. The Nazis revenge however was swift and merciless. If a German was killed inor near a village, the following day the village was flooded with Germans who used to round up all the men of the village and simply shoot them.

This action or reaction of the Germans became so routine that if a German used to be killed, the nearby male villagers used to run away to more distant villages or to the forest. Staying away a day or two they used to return home. By then the Germans had already been in the village and had done their savage work. Killing the males that did not run away or hoped to prove their non involvement in the death of a German.

As a rule the Germans did not return a second time to the same village to round up the ones that were in hiding.

On a late July afternoon the ghetto gates on Kobrin and Shershev street opened up and an army of the brown cuffed police that we gave them different names like Schutz Polizei, Schupo, Field-Polizei, or Einzatzgruppen, started passing though the ghetto and out the main market square gate to Pacewicza Street on the Arian side. The ghetto inhabitants estimated them to be a thousand strong . Such a number of executioners we have not seen before. Their appearance caused a panic in the ghetto. Many speculated that they have come for us. The following morning as the six of

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us workers at the Ortscommendanture had to cut some wood near the local gendarmerie, we saw them billeted in tents nearby. When we left work at six, they were still there.

The next day as we showed up to wok a none commissioned officer lead us to a warehouse pointing to some buckets with lime, some trowels, crude paint brushes, bags of cement and sand, ordered us to load it on a truck. Get on it and accompanied by two soldiers we left town.

We were driven in a north eastern direction towards Pruzany on the highway Brest-Litowsk Baranowicz. We have barely covered five six kilometers when we notice an entire village in flames some two kilometers off the road. As we kept on driving we noticed one more and again more in the distance. All together we counted six villages, not only we, but the two soldiers too looked at it with surprise.

A dozen kilometers out of Pruzany, we noticed in the distance a guard house. We came closer and stopped in front of it. It housed a dozen or so soldiers, two of whom were constantly guarding a wooden bridge that span across a river that bisected the road. We were told to cover the walls with a new layer of cement ad white wash it, as bed bugs got in the cracks of the walls.

After having finished our work in mid afternoon, we set out for home. On the way back we passed again the burning villages over which heavy smoke was hanging. Parallel to the closed village but at the roadside we noticed two women sitting and crying. As we drove by, we yelled to them, what village is it? They yelled back: Rudniky!! The truck kept on driving.

After getting back into the ghetto, we found out more about that event.

Like Shershev with its swamp and forests, southwest of Pruzany, so Ruzany north east of Pruzany had its own swamps and forests. The river I mentioned in the few lines above, between Ruzany and Pruzany lie in such impenetrable swamps. On the Pruzany side the swamps borderer on farm land that stretch for kilometers all the way to Pruzany. On the Ruzany side the foliage and reed covered impenetrable swamps which eventually change into thick forest. The river and whats more important the swamp formed a natural obstacle for unexperienced navigators in those treacherous places.

Behind hose impenetrable swamps the thick forest became that summer a haven for partisans whose numbers kept on growing. Many of those partisans being local peasants, knew secret passages in those swamps though which they used to cross at night to attack the Germans and run back the same way.

The Germans unable to chase them, decided on fortifying individual houses in certain villages converting them into defense positions. This however did not discourage the partisans. To the contrary it gave them an immobile objective to attack. And attack they did. Crossing at night the swamps they attacked the fortified house in the village of Rudniky. The Germans behind sand bags resisted stubbornly. The partisans, unable to overcome them, set the wooden house on fire. Seeing the hous in flames, being sure the Germans perished in the fire and not wanting to hang around for fear that the fire will attract the Germans from Pruzany, they went back the way they came to the forest.

The Germans were prepared for such an eventuality. Unknown to the villagers they built a fire proof cellar in the house. When the house became engulfed in flames, they went into the cellar. Thus survived, loosing only three of the twenty men inside.

Before day break all ale bodies men left the village fearing immediate German retribution. To their surprise no Germans came that day nor the following one. Slowly they all came back to their families and homesteads.

It was a week later, before daybreak, that not only the village of Rudniky but five nearby villages were surrounded. The Germans picked out every male sixteen to sixty. Taking them behind the villages, they shot everyone of them. Ordering the women to load their wagons with whatever they wanted, they drove them out of the villages, setting the buildings on fire.

This crime was committed by those thousand or so row cuffed Nazi police that passed through the ghetto and those were the fires of the burning six villages that we saw passing by.

Having accomplished their horrible retribution, the German police did not go back to Pruzany. Most likely there was another such crime waiting or them somewhere else to commit.

Everyday of the summer 1942 kept on bringing heart rendering news about the Jewish settlements in our area. From the few miraculously saved individuals that managed to sneak into the Pruzany ghetto we used to hear stories of slaughter of partial or total annihilation of centuries old Jewish communities.

With the Nazi introduction of the two ghetto system., the annihilation of many communities used to be divided in parts-phases. First the Nazis slaughtered the "B" ghettos and later the ghettos "A". Some ghettos agony was extended for a longer period of time y conducting slaughters or actions as they were called several times. As an example I will give the town of Kobryn, forty five kilometers from Pruzany where the killers came back four

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times in 1942 before they killed the last Jew of the community of close to ten thousand souls. Thus ending a five hundred years history of Jewish Kobryn. Those are the dates; June 2/42 the annihilation of ghetto "B", June 6/42 four thousand more Jews taken to Brona-Gora and killed. July 25/42 two thousand more and on October 14/42 the last of ghetto "A" were liquidated.

The same fate befell all the shtetls in eastern Europe that found themselves under Nazi rule. I know of the places in my region. Names so familiar to me that as I read them they sound like a litany with a lament so full of pain that should shatter the heavens.

Names like Bereza-Kartuska, Ruzany, Kosowo, Iwaceicze, Antopol, Horodez, Zabinka, Tewle, Drohyczyn, Janow-Poleski, Motel, Pinsk, Dawidgroder, Olszany, Lchwa, Luniniec, Telechany, Nowy-Dwor, Porozow, Swislocz, Wolkowisk, Slonim, Baranowicze, Nieswiez, Stolbce, And many more. All within a 'stones throw" of my shtetl, Shershev, where the over five hundred years old Jewish culture and life was snuffed out for ever.

It was from those single, temporary rescued individuals of those places that we learned of what happened there. What took place in the countless other Jewish communities from which not a single soul escaped, we know nothing but imagined the worst. Unfortunately we have been proven to be correct.

Unable to travel, always under supervision outside the ghetto, we knew nothing of what has transpired in neighboring shtetls. In fact we no longer knew how far we are from the nearest Jewish community.

Late that summer the ghetto community received an order to deliver fifty able bodies men to the Schuz-Polizei for transportation to the town of Wolkowisk which was being turned into a camp. The rare reports we used to get from there were shocking. Understandably nobody wanted to be sent there. The community made up a list and the fifty men were sent away. How many among them were from Shershev I do not know, but one of them was Shepsl Rudnitzky our former wagon drayer (coachman) that used to haul the merchandise for us before the war. He was the sole provider for his old parents. A hard working honest man. How they fared the remaining few moths until the liquidation of the ghetto Pruzany I do not dare to think.

Somehow we managed to survive that summer on our diet of potatoes, bread and soup. Of course items like meat, sugar and alike, we had not tasted since we have been expelled from Shershev. Regretfully my parents, sisters and brother had not tasted it any more until they experienced their last painful breath of air in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

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For an unknown to me reason, I started to develop boils. They mainly appeared on my legs. One at a time. But as soon as one disappeared, a second used to appear.

A close friend of my sister Sheva, by the name of Reshl Shlosberg who worked as an assistant nurse in the ghetto hospital, after hearing from my sister about my problem, said that they deal with it daily and that it is easily cured with an injection of boiled milk.

Somehow my parents got from somewhere a quarter of a glass of milk and she, Reshl, after boiling it, injected it in me. Lo and behold, the boils disappeared.

With the approach of the days of awe, that is the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur (the day of atonement), the final phase of the slaughter of Jews intensified. This time it was aimed at the remnants of the ghetto "A" the so called by the Germans "useful Jews." Jewish tradesmen and artisans that worked for the Nazi.

So intense and concentrated by the Nazis was their effort to annihilate the Jews that even their desperate need of the Jewish artisans for the war effort could not save them.

As in previous cases a few or single individuals managed to hide, at times for a week or two without food and get away at night. Most of them fell victims to supposedly non Jewish friends or real and open treacherous characters who after robbing them of what ever they have still had, either killed those unfortunate helpless individuals themselves or handed them over to the Germans or local police.

From a couple of those that managed to get into our ghetto, we heard that somewhere along the way they were apprehended by Ukrainian police who were threatening them with death using a cold weapon. Apparently to those hopeless, resigned desperate Jews, death by a bullet was not the worst thing nor frightening enough.

Interesting that in that case, after taking from those Jews everything of value, they let them go. Most likely not wanting to waste the time and effort on rounding up some locals to bury them.

From such strugglers it became known in the ghetto of the annihilation of ghetto "B" in Nieswiez on the seventh day of the month of Av, that is July 21/42. A couple of months later we heard that ghetto "A" in Nieswiez was slaughtered. It took place the ninth day of Cheshvan, October 30/42.

In Nieswiez my father had a sister Pola (Pesl) married to Zelik Remez,a son Max age five, and younger children whom I never knew. We never heard from the again.

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In one of the sheds in the Ortscommendanture where I was working, I found a German map of our district. I could not get over the accuracy of that map. It covered a territory from Pinsk in the east to Brest-litowsk in the west. From Nowogrodek in the north to Rowno in the south. I found on that map every trail and every footpath. Not only in the fields but in every town and village. Every church, one steeple one that is an Orthodox one and two steeple ones, meaning Catholic. I hid it on me and brought it into the ghetto.

I shared my find with my friend Kalman Kalbkoif. A couple days later my friend asked me to lend him the map as his acquaintance would like to copy it. A couple days later my friend Kalman tells me that last night, his acquaintance left the ghetto with a group of young men for the forest to join the partisans taking with him the original map.

This was the first group of young people that left our ghetto to join the partisans and fight the Germans. How many they were I do not know. What I know is that in command of that group was Yosel Untershur, who took along his wife and Mordchai Bear Seagal. Those two I knew personally. The one that borrowed my map, Maitchik, I knew indirectly.

The final liquidation of the ghetto in Brest-Litowsk began on October 14/42. Two men succeeded in getting away and making their way to Pruzany bringing the sad news with them.

Shortly after the ghetto "A" of Drohyczyn, my uncle Reuven's family and Antopol were annihilated. Before we had a chance to get over that news the Jews of Chomsk were slaughtered. This time the victims in Chomsk were the eighty families from Shershev that settled there after the first slaughter.

Among those eighty Shershev families were my good friend Laizer Rotenberg, his wife and newly born child. As well as his brother, my friend Litek. Their parents Yosef and Rayah with their three daughters: Pola, Lisa and Minah. Plus my friends grandparents Joshua and Bluma Pinsky.

Some one managed to save himself from that, the second slaughter of Chomsk and managed to sneak himself into the ghetto Pruzany to tell the story as it transpired during the final hours of that slaughter. This is what he told us:

It was on the second day of "Rosh Hashanah" (Jewish New Year), Sunday, September 13/42 early in the morning that Chomsk was surrounded by the Nazi killers. Herding the Jews together without any pretext, they led them straight to the two mass graves of the original Jews of Chomsk slaughtered fifteen months earlier. This time however, the Gentile population did not show as much enthusiasm in rounding up the Jews as in the previous time. The Jews of Shershev had nothing to leave for them. In fact some of

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the Gentiles intervened on behalf of the Jewish artisans whom they badly needed.

The Germans obliged by leaving one of each most needed tradesman with his family but picked the ones with the smallest families. For example: there were four blacksmith families: Daniel Meister, his wife and three children: Yosl, Mayah and Reuven. Their oldest son Avreml was already married with a baby and was considered another family. Another blacksmith Srolkah Meister had a wife with several children and so was another blacksmith Yudl Zatotzky with a wife and children. The Germans temporary spared Avreml Meister and his family as he had only one child.

The same standard was applied to a male tailor and a seamstress. For the seamstree's they left over my friend's sister Pola Rotenberg, a single girl age twenty three. As she was of age and single, the Germans would not allot her the privilege of sparing her parents or her two sister who were still minors.

With the eighty Shershev families in Chomsk were also murdered the dozen young boys and girls of Chomsk that managed to save themselves from the first slaughter.

When it came to the decision about Pola Rotenberg some kind of disagreement arose between the Nazi killers. Apparently some of them considered to spare her family. Others disagreed and were ready to dispose of her too. She was ordered to undress the same as all others destined to die. Another Nazi ordered her to get dressed contending that she can be spared alone. Again she was ordered to undress and then again to dress.

Because of my close friendship with her two brothers, Laizer and Litek, I was also close to their older sister Pola. As the events of those days are constantly on my mind, I often try to imagine how their older sister Pola felt and what went through her mind as she was being ordered to undress and get dressed in front of the ditch filled with dead and half dead bodies. Bodies of her friends and relatives among them as her fate depended on and was being decided by the whim of a murderous Nazi officer or soldier.

The older of Pola's two younger sisters, the fifteen year old Lisa, developed into a beautiful and very attractive young woman. To such an extent that one of the Nazi murderers watching her getting undressed remarked : What a pity, such a beautiful young woman has to die.

As usual, the Nazis ordered all the Jews to get completely undressed, lining them up at the rim of the ditch they mowed them down.

The five tradesmen with their small immediate families were taken away literally from the rim of the graves and handed over to the local so called Ukrainian for safe keeping. Those few souls lived together in one house

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knowing only too well that their time is running out. They were not under lock and key but neither were they permitted outside. The police station was across the street from them and kept an eye on them.

The only single man among them Aaron Bikstein's younger brother, a top notch men's tailor, took the chance one night and sneaked out. He made it to Pruzany. It was from him that we heard the story in such details.

A couple of weeks later rumors coming from Drohyczn spread in the ghetto that the last four tradesmen and their families in Chomsk were killed.

The month of October 1942 was a particularly vicious one for the remainder of the Jews in our part. The savagery manifested by the Nazi murderers is beyond description. I do not know exactly how long it took the Nazis to annihilate the last Jews of Brest-Litowsk, but I know that besides those killed on the spot, the rest were shipped to Treblinka.

What I know for sure is that on October 15/42 the Nazis succeeded to slaughter in one day 2500 Jews of the ghetto "A" in Drohyczyn and 2300 Jews of the ghetto "A" in Antopol. The very same day 2600 Jews of ghetto "A" in Bereza-Kartuska were put to death.

These numbers and dates can give us an idea of the amount of man power the Nazis alloted for this task and intensity with which they were going about the annihilation of the Jews in Europe. I am mentioning a couple of places very close to my birth place and with which I became emotionally connected during those dark days.

I am not mentioning places a bit farther from my home town. Places that shared the same fate, unknown to me and where not a single soul survived to tell the story.

In the slaughter of Drohyczyn I lost my father's brother Rueven, his wife Chashka, their three children, Michla age 17, Shalom age 14 and Shevach age 7. My uncle was torn away from his family some months earlier supposedly to go to a work camp. That entire lot was shot outside Drohyczyn as soon as they were led out of town.

As far as I remember there were at that time some dozen Shershev families in Antopol and even less in Bereza-Kartuzka. However in Drohyczyn were somewhere between eighty and a hundred. Most of them perished in the slaughter of the ghetto "B" on July 26/42. The rest with ghetto "A" on October 15/42

The Jews of Shershev being introduced to Nazi brutality right a the start of the war and not having deep roots or commitments to extended families in Drohyczn were more willing to take the risk and run for their lives, despite the next to nil chances of succeeding.

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Indeed, a few days after the slaughter of Drohyczyn, six Shershev men and two women made their way into the ghetto Pruzany. A distance of one hundred kilometers through forests and field where a Jew would be hunted down like a wild animal.

The names of five of the six men I still remember. They were : Chaim Lewkovigch, Pinchus Weiner, Leibl Lebershtein, Avreml Kwelman and Moishe Tilter. The women were: Peshkah Zaritzky and Lola Baumriter.

They were indeed sole survivors, leaving behind parents, brothers, sisters and what more, wives and children. Among the eight were four married people.

I do not want to dwell on the moral aspect of that event, nor am I accusing neither justifying it. Who am I to do it? I am leaving it to more qualified people than I or still better to those who were confronted with such a decision.

Apparently some one from outside the ghetto noticed them crawling under the wires and counted them. For the next day the German gendarmery came to the ghetto committee demanding the eight Jews.

The usual negotiations started between the committee and the Germans. This time the Germans were adamant and insisted on the handing over the eight Jews. No amount of bribery could change their minds.

I remember that unforgettable morning. The committee, being compelled to hand over the eight Shershev Jews, ordered the Jewish ghetto police to execute the job of collecting them. The police went to the houses in which those just escaped from death Jews were, gathered them in order to hand them over to the Germans.

As far as I know it was the first time the Pruzany ghetto committee was compelled to execute such a repulsive job like handing over Jews into Germans hands. Up to now they were always successful in redeeming Jews from German hands. Nor was the Jewish ghetto police conditioned t perform such tasks. To execute such a job the police needed the moral support as well as the physical presence of some members of the committee which they too lacked.

So the police was accompanied by some members of the committee led by the president himself, Itzik Janovitch, respected and admired by all citizens of the ghetto. They were followed by a crowd of onlookers. When they approached the house inwhich Gotl Weiner lived and where his by ten years younger, the eighteen year old brother Pinchas who just saved himself from the slaughter of Drohyczyn was hiding, Gotl stepped out the door approaching the chief of police and said; I am ready, we can go.

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The ghetto Pruzany was not that large that most people were total strangers. Besides Gotl was known in the ghetto as one of those that risked walking from Pruzany to Chomsk and Drohyczyn and back carrying so called controband to support his family there. The chief answered: We did not come for you but for your brother. Gotl did not accept it insisting to go with them instead of his brother. The members of the committee got closer and so did the crowd. Gotl tried to reason with the president saying: The Germans want a Jew, they do not know who he is or looks like. Let me go instead and let my brother remain alive. He is only eighteen years old. We could all see the tears in his eyes as he pleaded for his brother's life.

The moment Gotl uttered those words the mask of the play or charade dropped. Up to now the committee was talking of the eight men being put in jail while further negotiations with the Germans for their release will continue. Although everybody knew that this time the Germans have something else in mind. Now with those words everybody realized that there is no need to pretend.

With a trembling voice the president Janovitch said; Gotl, I am not G-d. I can not decide who shall live and who shall die. The Germans want the one who sneaked into the ghetto. I can not change the fact. It is up to G-d and he made the decision.

The eight people were gathered together. Poor, lonely, forlorn, wretched souls who had already nobody in the world to shed a tear for them. The only one that did have was the eighteen year old Pinchas, whose brother was willing to die for him. The others had left behind their families in Dorhyczyn where death had claimed them only a few days earlier.

The Germans put them in jail. For several days the committee continued to negotiate their release hoping against hope to succeed in freeing them.

Meantime the two jails in Pruzany were being filled up. The time came to empty the jails as usually in the Nazi manner. They ordered the committee to send men to dig a hole in the usual place, six kilometers out of town. A couple days later they ordered a group of men for the next day to be the grave coverers. When the men showed up the next morning a German told them to go back to the ghetto.

All kinds of rumors began to circulate in the ghetto. Like the Germans decided to stop executions or that the allies cautioned the Nazis against killing civilians and alike. All those rumors stopped when it became known that the Germans want those men back the next day.

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When the next day the men returned back from work to the ghetto they told of the killing of three truck loads of people, among those were the eight Shershev souls.

Why the Germans postponed the execution for a day became known a couple days later when two Shershev Christians came to Pruzany and met a Shershev Jew who was working on the Arian side. This is what they told him: A couple of days ago an auto full of Germans drove into town and stopped infront of the house in which Avreml Kwelman used to live. Among the disembarking Germans was Avreml Kwelman who carried with him a shovel. He led them to a spot near the fence and started digging bringing up a small metal box. With that box they all got back into the auto and drove away.

The rest of the story became clear to all after the explanation given by two former members of the Shershev Jewish committee that were now living in the ghetto Pruzany. They were Chazkl Krugman and Meir Kabizetzky. This is what they told us: When we, the Jews of Shershev were still living at home the Nazis from Biels-Podlask put a tribute on Shershev Jews in the amount of two hundred thousand rubles and a kilogram of gold. (I have written about it earlier). The gold collected form the community was almost twice as much. It was decided by the committee to keep the extra for an emergency or to be more precise in case the Germans decided to demand more. The extra gold was divided to three parts and three committee members were entrusted in hiding it in a safe place unknown to the others. The committee was sworn to secrecy. One of the three was Avrmel Kwelman.

The rest is conjecture, but it was believed in the ghetto to be a correct one. Apparently when the jail inmates were being loaded on the trucks, in desperation knowing where they are being taken, Avreml Kwelman cried out to the Germans that he will give them gold in they will let him live. They most likely herded the inmates back into he jail, took him to Shershev where he dug up his part of the gold entrusted to him, driven back to the jail in Pruzany and was executed with the rest a day later.

Among the executed was as I mentioned earlier, Lola Baumriter, the Shershev pharmacist's daughter and my classmate. She blossomed in the last couple of years into a beauty and was considered to be not only the most beautiful girl in Shershev but also in the entire district of Pruzany. The darling of every older boy and young men around, among them sons of committee members of the Pruzany ghetto who tried to save her at any price. It was all in vain.

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As far as we knew, we, the ghetto Pruzany, was an island in a sea of gentiles. From what we were able to gather the nearest Jewish community was Bialystok, a distance of one hundred and thirty five kilometers away. No more could one find the Jewish shtetls every ten-fifteen kilometers apart, nor the numerous Jewish settlements still closer in between. The constant question lay heavy on our mind and hearts: How much longer will they let us remain alive.

A partial answer came on November 1/42. On that morning as I approached the gate of the ghetto through which I used to go outside to work every morning, I noticed a large crowd at the gate. Getting closer I saw a detachment of Schutz Polizei outside the ghetto and others patrolling the perimeter around the barbed wire fence of the ghetto. Without an explanation we were told that nobody is allowed to leave. The crowd continued to grow in front of that main gate as more and more workers were trying to go to work. As the office of the committee was on the street opposite the gate people began to assemble in front of that building with the hope of finding out what is happening.

Inside, the committee was having an emergency meeting which was interrupted with the arrival of some Gestapo men. Entering the meeting hall and finding the entire committee present, the German in charge announced that as of this moment the ghetto is in a transitional state, meaning that it can be transferred at any time. Commanding to be given the files of every person in the ghetto, they told the committee members to load it onto their auto and pulled away.

Meantime the crowd in front of the committee office had grown to a size that it took up the width of the street on either side of the building, hoping to find out what there is in store for us, speculating and predicting conceivable and inconceivable things.

The first to appear outdoors from the meeting was Zalman Segal, the so called "foreign minister" of the ghetto. The one that used to conduct negotiations with the Nazis on behalf of the Jewish community behind the barbed wire fence. His tall slim figure towered over the crowd on the porch. From a thousand throats cried out the question: what does it mean? Have they come for us? Raising his hand in a gesture for silence from his grief laden face and twisted lips came a quiet answer as if he would be talking to himself yet was heard across the entire crowd: What makes us better than the Jews of Brisk or Pinsk or Kobryn? Have we got more "Zchut-Avot (ancestral merit) than they? Have we earned it more than they? His uttered few words were drowned out in an outbreak of laments and cries. It was

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impossible to hear him any more nor did it make any difference to me. I turned my steps in the direction where I could find my parents, sisters and brother to spend the last few hours of our lives together.

As I imagined, the news had already reached them and every corner of the ghetto before I got to them. In order to get to our room I had to pass the house owners big living room which he converted into a workshop. It usually used to be a noisy place. There was now a total silence. The owner and family were sitting stuck away in the corner of that big room giving the impression as if the room is empty. My entry did not make any impression of them. They barely glanced at me without any sign of recognition. Without even saying good morning I walked into our room. There I found my parents, sisters and brother. All sitting on the double bed and couch given to us by my aunt Sheindl when we came to Pruzany almost a year earlier. They too got close to each other with the same empty gaze in their eyes as those in the other room and an expression of resignation and despare on their faces.

Without saying a word I sat down near them sinking in my own thoughts. First came the realization of the imminent and avoidable death and a desparing desire to live or at least to try and save myself. I have to admit shamefully that I was thinking of saving myself without thinking of saving my dear ones with whom as far as I was concerned, I was spending the last hours of our lives.

Nobody said a word and if somebody did say something it was without meaning or value. It was of no importance anymore.

So we sat until noon listening to the outside which was as silent as a cemetery/ It was entirely different than I have imagined it would be. I imagined tat after surrounding the ghetto the Nazis would enter with shouts and shooting, herding all the inhabitants into the street and from there outside town to be shot. Meanwhile we did not hear any shots nor shooting.

The silence was interrupted by my mother who got up to announce that she is going to prepare something to eat. Nobody thought of it nor was anybody hungry, but it gave her something to preoccupy herself with.

The lunch that consisted of dry potatoes went down with difficulty. I decided to see what is going on in the street and at our relatives. On the way I could see the main ghetto gate. There were still a lot of Germans there, but none of the Jews that were there earlier that morning. From a few passersby I found out that the committee made an attempt to communicate with the Germans a couple of times but to no avail.

At our relatives the mood was the same as in our place, but being a larger crowd they tried to be more preoccupied with daily chores and it seemed to

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me that the time there passed faster. I returned to find everybody sitting in the same places as when I left them. They looked at me with a glimmer of hope that dissappeared instantly without me saying a word as it was written all over my face.

After a while we decided to join our relative hoping to find some comfort in dying together and so my immediate and extended family sat there waiting for death, not knowing when and in what form it will come. We sat there together without sleep not getting undressed all night. If someone did lie down and dozed off, it was only for a minute to awaken from a night mare. Unable to sit all night in one spot, some used to get up and look out the windows or walk nervously around from room to room.

If now so many decades later I have difficulties in recollecting all my thoughts at that time, how can I attempt to describe the thoughts and comments uttered by members of my family then in those desperate and hopeless moments. It is my belief that if anyone of us had any thought of attempting to save himself or herself it was me. For my parents, sisters, and brother there was no hope Nor for anybody present there. What was going on in their minds?

And so the night passed. At dawn we noticed someone sneaking by with a "Tallit" (prayer shawl) under his arm. It could only be a Jew on his way to the synagogue. With my mother's encouragement I too went to a nearby synagogue. To my surprise the synagogue was full. The crowd started to pray and after the "Shmona-Esray" (the eighteen benedictions, part of the daily prayer), we recited the "Ovinu Malkeynu" (our father our king, a penitential prayer said on special days). If I ever recited that prayer and paid attention to it, it was that morning. Never in my life have I seen a congregation saying this prayer with so much commitment, with so much dedication, so much devotion and heaven spliting weeping and been part of it.

Leaving the synagogue, I was thinking to myself that G-d surely watched and listened to those fervent prayers. How can he not answer? And so passed the second day in tension and fear.

We could not understand the game the Nazis are playing. What are they waiting for? Some of us suggested the idea that gentiles are digging for us mass graves outside town but it is not finished yet.

The next morning the synagogues were even more crowded than the previous day and the prayers more fervent if it was at all possible. During the day few more people appeared in the streets. True, mostly on the side streets and alleys. Never the less we began to see people on the street.

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And so another day went by. This time rumors began to circulate that the committee succeeded in making contact with the Germans. The Germans requested somethings and were satisfied with the response.

Finally, on the fourth day a couple Gestapo men showed up at the committee office to announce that the ghetto will remain temporary in its place. There was however a new list of restrictions. Among them reduction of rations and the total abolition of exit permits from the ghetto that was so far handled by the committee. From now on no Jew was permitted to go outside the ghetto unless accompanied by a German guard, nor was a Jew permitted to work outside the ghetto unless under constant guard, regardless if with a group or by himself. The large number of Germans that have been place at the three ghetto entrances have been removed, except for one at each gate and the cordon of guards around the fence had been replaced by patrols.

In order to facilitate in patrolling the ghetto fence, the Germans straightened the fence by cutting away parts of the ghetto, thus squeezing the population tighter. One of the ghetto main streets, Kobriner Street, was partly cut of including the building housing the committee. The committee office which took up an entire building was forced to move. They picked my uncle and aunt's, Leibl and Sheindl Pinsky's nearby suitable house. They were given in return a big house on "Rezky" street to accommodate not only my uncle and family but the rest of my extended family like my grandparents and their son, my uncle Eli, his brother Hershl and wife, my father's cousins from Malecz, Joshua and Zalmen Niselbaum, with their families, who all lived previously in my uncle's house.

The ghetto sighed with temporary relief. We went back to our room with a better feeling than we have left it a few days earlier but also with an increased awareness of our perilous situation. No longer were our exit permits valid and the six of us, workers at the orstommendanture had to wait for a soldier that used to come daily for us. We dared not go out of the yard where we worked to read the newspapers plastered on the wall. Even to go from the orstcommendanture to the wood yard we needed an escort. Because of it we used to miss the left overs from the soldiers kitchen which I missed very much, for not only did I miss a midday meal, but also regardless what the soldiers left over or would not eat, it was still much better than what we had in the ghetto.

It was only then that I began to wonder if my parents, sisters and brother were having enough food to fill their stomachs. In general the food situation in the ghetto worsened. The official ration for the population would never suffice, but the leadership of the ghetto up to now managed to bribe the

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Germans and bring in more than was the allotment. Besides, a fair amount of food used to find its way through the fence. With the new regulations imposed by newly come Gendarms and the constant patrols around the fence, it became much more difficult to get in extra food.

With me worked a young man from Shershev by the name of Sholem Berenstein, four or five years older than I. A former Soviet soldier and run away German prisoner of war on whose shoulders lay the responsibility to provide for his mother and younger brother and sisters as his father dies shortly before the war. Necessity drove him to look for some sort of income even more than the other co workers.

As of lately we began to spend more and more time at cutting wood in the closed in storage yard which was at the outskirts of town ajoining the gendarmery. The entrance consisted of a wide gate at which was a guardhouse manned by two soldiers who rarely ventured outside, preferring to sit in the heated inside. There really was no need for them to go outside as nobody was coming in or out except for us and the presence of Germans in the guardhouse was enough to ke3p anybody out. Not that there was nothing to guard. The Bolshevics left the warehouses there full with spare parts for tanks and other machinery. I personally saw tank motors in its original packing and who know what else there was in crates and boxes. Many of those warehouses were under lock and key. In one was a pile of discarded Soviet weapons, mostly rifles many with broken stocks but otherwise in functional condition.

The two soldiers at the gate paid little attention to us, spending most of the time sleeping on the bed in the guard house and keeping the fire going in the cast iron stove. So Sholem Berenshtein attempted once to go out in the street and come back unnoticed, or maybe the two ordinary soldiers saw but could not care less. What ever the reason , he started doing it making contact with a gentile across the street some fifty meters down the road. That Christian became the intermediary buying food from farmers and selling it to Shalom Berenshtein. We in return used to divide t up, hiding it as not to look suspicious at the gate and bring it into the ghetto. There Berenshtein had his customers to sell it to. Soon we started to take turns going out that yard and crossing the street to pick up the food. German vehicles used to pass by on the road, but fortunately none of us was ever caught.

Smuggling potatoes was not a profitable venture, so we concentrated on barley, porridge, grin, beans, peas, even cheese, butter and a cople times whole frozen fish, fresh from the river. Yes, there were a few local Jews in the ghetto that could from time to time permit themselves such a luxury, but a

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very few and only from time to time and far in between. We, the risk takers could only look at it and dream.

The following morning Shalom Berenshtein used to bring the money to work where we used to divide the profit among us six, retaining the original investment for further transactions.

Not every day could our supplier provide us with something and not everyday did we spend cutting wood in that place. To go to our supplier from the ortscommendanture was out of the question. Those days were lean days for us and our families.

The events of November 1st, that put the ghetto "on notice" has shaken the ghetto from its complacency. The inhabitants, particularly the young people suddenly realized how perilous the situation is and started to look for ways to save themselves.

Common sense dictated that the only place where a Jew had any chance of survival s in the forest with partisans or on their own as partisans. But partisans did not accept unarmed men, nor was it easy to find them. They too were constantly on the move, being hunted by Germans, local police, local Nazi sympathizers and other partisan groups of other persuasions like the Polish and Ukrainian nationalistic groups. Those groups were at that time fighting the Germans and at the same time fighting each other. The only thing they ad in common was a deep rooted antisemitim and they killed Jews as efficiently as the Nazis.

The only group that would and at times did accept Jews were the pro Soviet ones. But even among themselves, there was no shortage of antisemites that made life for Jews even in their ranks unbearable. Not to mention the ordinary farmer or peasant from whom all partisans used to take away their produce in order to survive. No wonder that many peasants looked upon the partisans as ordinary robbers, and many used to denounce them to the Germans.

A Jewish partisant group found it even harder to survive than other groups due to the element of antisemitism that was so wide spread among the population and the phenomenon introduced by the Nazis depriving the Jew of any claim to belong to the human race and designating them to total annihilation.

It was only when Jewish groups have proven themselves to as equal or better fighters than non Jews that they started to be accepted in non Jewish groups.

The going into the forest had a lot to do with the elements. If partisans found it difficult to survive in the forest in summer, how much more is it in

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winter. All the hunter had to do is to follow the foot prints of the on being hunted. While a wild animal is created to blend in its environment, can out run the hunter or hid in a hole, a human being can do none of those things. What about the winter cold, when one is forced to spend night after night under open skies? Unable to sleep due to cold, fear and hunger.

I still remember my naïve argument in ghetto during that previous summer, namely that I prefer a night in bed in ghetto than wander about in the forest.

In that argument was applicable in summer, how much more relevent was it for winter.

Apparently there were many others of the same opinion in the ghetto. Especially after November 1st there were many who claimed that we have to prepare ourselves for the forest, but as long as we can remain under a roof, why not?

There were however, those who understood that "we might miss the train" so to say. That is that the Germans might surprise us by surrounding the ghetto and take all away before we know it.

The insurmountable problem was the procurement of weapons From time to time one of the workers employed at clearing the former Soviet military barracks used to stumble upon a weapon or a piece of it, a damaged rifle or revolver, a few cartridge or a grenade. But one could never be sure if it is functional or a dud. But all those find were not enough to arm even one group of men.

The effort of procurement weapons had to be intensified and this required organization and time.

But what will happen if the Germans won't give us the needed time and come for us in the middle of the winter? Having no choice we will run to the forest anyway. No matter what the consequences, we will have time to die.

However, to run into the forest we have to hide out. The "Evacuation" (clearing the Jews out of ghetto) during which the Germans will look "high and low" to make sure there is not a single Jew left in the ghetto. Only after the Nais will be sure that there are no more Jews left will they call off the guards around the ghetto fence which will give those that survived the searches a chance to sneak out quietly into the forests.

I will say that some of those hiding places were quite ingenious depending on space, availability or materials and finances.

Refugee families were here at a disadvantage. Living in somebody else's homes, most of them like ourselves, a family in one room, could do nothing. There were however, a few refugee families that lived in former Christian

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homes that were now included in the ghetto. One of them was the family Maletzky who lived in a former Christian house that consisted of a three by three meters room and a hallway that served as a wind break and a storage place for furs that they used for heating and cooking. Whatever and whenever they had something to cook. The entrance to the room was via the hallway.

The Maletzky family whom I described much earlier consisted of the mother Braina, her three sons; Nachum, Itzik and Moishe. The middle one Itzik was my friend. As that house looked so inconspicuous with no way to hide in it, the three Maletzky brothers, I and our friend Kalman Kalbkoif decided to dig a hideout there.

We moved the loose turf away a bit from the hallway's back wall and started digging, before the frost set in. The digging was done in the evenings after work. Filling up a sack full of earth, one of us use to take it on our shoulder, walking around the nearby alleys used to let it spill out slowly on the muddy ground where it used to be trampled in the mud in the early morning so it did not attract attention from preying German eyes.

Not having material to support the walls of the hole nor the ceiling, it remained nothing but a hole in the ground, narrow on top and wider on the bottom.

To say that it was a hide out would be wrong. All it could serve, we hoped, was that having covered it with short pieces of wood and spread some turf over it, it could pass a temporary superficial search. We were counting on the simplicity on the innocuousness of that little house, more than the security of the hide out. We assumed that it was one of the most primitive hide outs in the ghetto, but with our resources what else could we do?

By the way, my close friend Kalman Kalbkoif, his parents and his four sisters too, shared a Christian house with a young local couple by the name of Kotler. That couple too built a hide out in their half of the house. A roomy place big enough to accommodate thirty people, with enough food to lastfor weeks. It was even rumored that they had a well in there. Of course they were locals with an extended family that contributed work and materials.

Yet there were a few exceptions. My former private Hebrew teacher, Yaakov-Berl Eisenshtein, though a refugee himself lived in a former Christian house sharing it with his brother-in-law Itschah London. Those two families succeeded in building a double wall in one room which looked to me undetectable, simply a masterpiece of delusion. Of course they had the privacy of an entire house and yard. Taking in consideration that Itschah London had two grown sons, blacksmiths by trade and the improvisational

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ability of Yaakov-Berl. It is no wonder they survived the German searches after the liquidation of the ghetto and lived a life of hunted animals in the forest around Shershev.

A couple years after the end of the war, I found out that the last of those two families, Yaakov-Berl and his wife were betrayed by Shershev peasants shortly before the arrival of the Red Army. How the others of those two families perished will remain a secret forever.

How the ghetto continued with its superficial, so called "Normal" exitance, is now difficult to understand less so to describe. I remember when I used to lie down to sleep, my thoughts used to race one after another. Trying to imagine the last hours of my life, the very last minutes before my death. Listening to the regular and innocent breathing of my little brother and sisters, the constant turning and twisting of my parents in that very same double bed as my little sibling. I knew that they too are awake and are hunted by the same thoughts and nightmares as I. Now, that I am a parents and grandparent I can understand how dark and desperate their thoughts were.

Lying on that narrow couch I used to deliberate and wonder if my digging a hide out for myself was such a good idea. What will my life be worth without my mother if by some miracle I will manage to survive the slaughter of the ghetto. I will admit that the dearest most precious person in the world to me was my mother and I could not imagine life without her.

How could I have understood then, my parent's concern for their children?

Eventually the weariness of the days work used to take over and I used to fall asleep for a few hours if lucky. Otherwise only to be awakened by a day long hunting nightmare.

In the short November and December days, I was the first to arise. The breakfast used to be prepared by my mother the night before. It consisted of a small pot containing three-four potatoes and a piece of beet for colour. She used to cook it in the evening on the small cast iron stove with the wood splinters that I used to bring from work. That stove while in used made our room unbearably hot in the previous summer but turned ice cold in the winter when the fire was out.

Getting up at five in the morning I used to throw in a few splinters of wood to warm up the potatoes and at the same time taking the chill off the cold room so that the rest of the family would not find the room so cold getting up as soon as I left.

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One morning as I was sitting down to eat the few potatoes, my little sister Sonia, who was not quite eleven years old said to me: Moishe, give me a potatoe. Before I realized what she just said to me, my father responded: Do not take the potatoes from him. He I on his way to work for the rest of the day and we are soon going to have breakfast.

Here I committed a sin, one in two that I committed in my life for which I tried to atone ever since, but in vain, for I am the only one that can forgive myself and I can not. I did not give her a potato.

All the years, ever since my liberation, I looked for justification for my act, at least an excuse. All I could come up with in my defense is the fact that all the time in ghetto, we never experienced a shortage of potatoes. I knew it that morning too.

Since beginning of December we stopped going to the Ortscommendanture and spent the entire time cutting wood at the warehouses yard. Two of us six were separated from the rest as they were registered as mechanics. One was from Shershev by the name of Zalmen Rosuchowsky, the second was from Kamieniec-Litewk. They started to work at repairing trucks in the same yard, so we used to see each other constantly.

Their work used to take them in the warehouses of the abandoned Soviet machinery and even in the one with the disfunctional Soviet weapons. Some of the warehouses were pad locked and when they needed machine parts from there, one of the two soldiers from the guard house used to go with them.

The ghetto youth began desperately to look for weapons which was unobtainable. The two mechanics began to eye the discarded ornaments in the warehouse. We all knew about it. We used to see it passing by the wide open doors of the warehouses when the two mechanics used to do some work there under the watchful eye of a soldier. We deliberately did not gaze at the weapons not to arise suspicion by the soldier.

Never the less among ourselves we began to look for a way to et a few rifles out. An occasion arose sooner than expected.

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ghetto he became a jack of all trades who used to go out to do all kinds of repairs for the Germans.

Doing some work for the Germans he needed a certain part. Knowing that he might find it in the warehouses where we worked, he went with a German soldier to us. Our guard took him around to all the individual stores, including the one with the weapons. This Itchak Hydamak noticed it. Finding the needed piece of machinery he left with his guard.

Before the week was up he was back with another soldier needing something which was of course in the warehouses where the weapons were. This time he came prepared, pulling behind him a sled stacked high with tin stove pipes. Coming into the guard house with his guard he pulled out a bottle of vodka from his pocket and proposed to have a drink with them. One drink led to a second and the now three soldiers began to feel comfortable. Not wanting to disturb them, he offered to go by himself for the needed part while they finish the bottle. Without hesitation one of the soldiers gave him the keys. He went straight to the warehouse grabbing a couple of rifle he shoved them into the empty pipes pinching both ends. Taking inconsideration that he was a man in his late forties he moved very swiftly. Before he realized what was happening, he was inside again for more. We did not wait for an invitation, just followed him and started grabbing rifles too. He, Hydamak, turned to us saying: take it fellows, now is your chance. From great excitement and unexpected wind all we stood in the middle of the yard with the rifles in hand not knowing what to do. Hydamak quickly shoved the other rifles in the stove pipes, squeezing the ends tightly together.
He harnessed himself to the sled and started out in the direction of the gate and guard house. Some one yelled, lets hide it. We pushed the weapons under a pile of wood.

I do not know how it happened, but some how the two mechanics became the sportsman for the six of us. I, being the youngest followed the rest. They, the two mechanics told us that they are in contact with a well organized group in the ghett who are in need of weapons. For the price of eight rifles the group will accept all six of us.

We, and that group knew the rifle stocks are broken. The Soviets broke them before they surrendered. The task before us was to get the rifles into the ghetto where carpenters could make new stocks. But how?

There was a middle age couple in Pruzany by the name of Helman. They had two sons both in the mid twenties. The olders name was Joseph and the younger Shmerl, who became a kind of helper attendant to the German

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Birgermeister (Mayor). Not so much to the mayor who used to spend a lot of time traveling around with other Nazi big shots in their Nazi uniforms, but to his wife to whom he became a messenger boy between her and the Judenrat. That is to say that whatever she needed or wanted, she used to send him for it to the Jews and the Jews produced and delivered. Did they have a choice?

The group partisans, the ones we were to be accepted in, worked out a plan. To this group belonged this Shmerl Helman, the mayor's messenger boy. A sled will be made with a double bottom. Shmerl Helman will ask the mayor for some wood, come with that sled to us for the wood. While some of us will distract the German guard which will come with him (at that time even Shmerl could not move about outside the ghetto without a guard). The others will hide the eight rifles in between the double decks and pile on some wood on top. Then, and only then we will hope for a miracle that he should not get caught at the ghetto gate.

Not only did this Shmerl put his life on the line, but the lives of his family. Ours, the six of us that worked there and our families and maybe the lives of hundreds or even thousands of other ghetto dwellers.

This Shmerl knew only too well what chance he is taking and how much is riding on his mission. Yet only a couple days later he appeare at the gate of the yard harnessed to a fairly large sled made in the ghetto by a young but good carpenter with the name of Hershl Morawsky. He is accompanied by a rifle toting soldier. They approach us, the soldier looks around and sees piles of wood.

I do not know if because of the cold or sheer bordom, the soldier turns around, walks back the few dozen meters to the guard house and disappears inside.

Now we are alone. We quickly take off the top covering of the sled put in the rifles, replace the cover and pile on some wood. We still have time to exchange a few words and wish each other good luck.

The soldier comes out of the guard house. Shmerl hitches himself up to the sled and they leave the yard.

We continue our work but constantly glancing in the direction of the gate expecting at any minute a bunch of Germans to come for us. In such tension the work day comes to an end. Our guard appears to lead us back to the ghetto.

Only after passing the gate we realize that our fear was a bit exaggerated, for why would a German gendarme stop to search a single Jew who is constantly under guard and apparently has the German's permission to take along with him a hand sled with pitiful wood splinters.

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On everybodys mind pressed the gravity of the situation and the ever present question: Will the Germans let us spend the winter in the ghetto? The barometer of that moment became the factory in the ghetto where workers used to put on leather soles on felt boots for the German army. Like a clock a big military truck used to bring raw material and take back the already made boots. It was said that as long as the Germans are bringing material we are safe. Should they stop the delivery of the raw material it will be a bad omen.

One of the first days of January happened to be a beautiful day and the two soldiers from the guard house came out for a stroll in the yard, which bordered with the land on which the soviets were building a military air port.

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Chapter 10

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On that terrain in the Soviet erected buildings were now housed the gendarmerie or to us known as the "Schutz-Polizei" or even the "Brown Cuffs." A couple of them strolled over to the two soldiers for a chat. As they were on the other side of the fence they had to speak loudly. I, being the closest to them could overhear their conversation After exchanging a few polite words, their conversation turned to the topic about Jews. I clearly heard one gendarme saying that if the Jews won't be taken away by the end of this month (January), they will remain until spring.

I took this remark seriously for it came from reliable sources, a gendarme, who told it to another German who was not concerned with the Jewish problem and could not care one way or the other. I did not like what I have heard and all that day had a bad premonition and when I got home I shared the news with my parents.

A few days later, we, that is part of our supposedly future partisant group, held a meeting in the quarters of the mechanic from Kamieniec-Litewsk. He and his wife lived in Moishe Glotzer's cramped attic on Kobriner Street, almost opposite my uncle and aunt's house which now served as the office of the "Judenrat."

At that meeting I told them what I overheard at work, hoping to add some urgency to our plans. Everyone present had his own interpretation and expressed his opinion, but nobody was in a hurry to rush into the forests in January. To be honest, neither did I. The meeting ended with no decision and we went home via back alleys.

As others, I too, dream while asleep. Some were good and some bad, some I had forgotten immediately some after a time. A few stayed in my memory forever. Still I never believed in them. Although my mother's dream of Molly Feinberg's falling off he ancient shul (synagogue) in Shershev did come to pass, I never paid much attention to it.

In the middle of January 1943 I had a dream. I was on a train. The train stopped at a railway station. The station itself, a non descript one story quadrangular building with two square windows on each side. A low leaning roof in all four sides to the center and the walls plastered in a gray color. I did not know why but that building seemed very repugnant to me, yet in the dream I knew that I have to get off here.

I woke up in a distressing mood and bitter taste in my mouth.

Due to the increase in guards around the ghetto fence, the shortage of many articles became acute. The first victims were the refugees, many of whom depended partly on the Judenrat.

In those January days of 1943, my diet consisted of the few potatoes my mother used to cook the previous evening, the piece of bread we used to get going out of the ghetto to work and the soup my mother used to concoct and save for me for when I got home. What the other members of the family were eating that January, I did not know and now ashamed to say I did not ask, which I regret even today. Not that it would have helped them anyway.

When in the third week of January the military truck came on their weekly visit to pick up the soled felt boots that were being made in the ghetto, they did not bring with them any raw material. That was a bad omen for the ghetto. There were those that made nothing of it. Others shrugged their shoulders. I am sure that among them were many that have much earlier saw the unavoidable impending catastrophy, but did not want to say it aloud not to make the gloomy atmosphere in the ghetto more depressing.

The few groups of partisants that have so far got out of the ghetto into the forests had a hard time. Some of them have been accepted into the established partisant groups, others tried to fend for themselves. They used to get food from the peasants, sometimes by persuasion and sometimes by force, but being always on the move between attacking and escaping the Germans, they were hard on their clothes, especially the footwear. The best and safest place to get some was the ghetto. To be more precise the Judenrat, which had to have leather and leather boots at all time to pacify the Germans.

Nobody in the Judenrat was surprised when during their late night meetings a couple of Jewish partisants used to appear asking for good clothing and footwear. They used to get it and get out of the ghetto that same night under the cover of darkness.

Of course such transactions used to be conducted in total secrecy, for in this case on secrecy depended the existence of the ghetto and the life of its ten thousand habitants.

Tuesday, the 26th of January is according to the Jewish calendar 20 days in the month of Shvat, my 20th birthday. My loving and devoted mother never failed to remind me of my Jewish birthday even in the darkest and lasat days of the ghetto.

The next day Wednesday, we, the six workers, held a meeting with some of the group of future partisans. It was held again in the quarters of the Kamieniec-Litowskers couple, across the offices of the Judenrat. The

meeting did not last long as nobody had any new plans or ideas and secondly we did not want to walk in the street late at night as it was prohibited to be outside after dark. Nobody cherished the idea of coming face to face with a Nazi at night. Even though we used to start our meetings after dark, still one could claim that one is coming from work up to seven o'clock, but not later.

The meeting was over at eight thirty and we started down stairs. The exit led to the yard. From the yard we walked to a wide gate that opened into Kobriner Street. The wide gate was higher than a man and there were no cracks in it, that one could look out into the street. In the gate itself was a little door which we had to open carefully as the door used to squeak. As soon as we touched the door we heard an auto stop across the street in front of the Judenrat. In the deathly quiet of the ghetto night we heard as the doors of the auto opened and a voice saying; "Willy keep guard," sounds of steps as they ascended the porch. A loud opening of a door and five-six seconds later, several shots.

We remained frozen to the ground, for up to now we had not heard a single shot fired in the ghetto. No more than two minutes later we could hear the Germans getting out of the Judenrat, into the auto and pulled away.

We immediately heard talking and yelling in Yiddish. Opening the little door in the gate, we noticed a crowd gathering in front of the Judenrat. It did not take long to find out what happened. As the Gestapo men entered the Judenrat they found most of the members present including the president Itzl Yanovitz (Janowicz). Among the present were two armed partisans who had come from the forest with a list of things they needed. As faith wanted the Gestapo men walked in on them. The two armed partisans seeing the Germans enter, jumped up and ran out the back door. The Germans noticing armed men running out pulled out their handguns and started firing indiscriminately, killing one member of the Judenrat and the night watch man, wounding several others.

The Gestapo men in the excitemen forgot to say what they came for or maybe they wanted to play cat and mouse with the Jews. Whatever the reason, all they said was that they wanted the partisans by eleven o'clock that very evening. Otherwise they have their own method of dealing with the situation.

All the Judenrat had was a couple of hours. Who the two partisans were was known. One was Mordechai -Bear Segal, the second was a young man from Bialistok whose name I do not remember. Those two partisans had family in the ghetto and on their way out they stopped over and took along a couple of their brothers.

They got out of the wired fence minutes before the Nazis reinforced the guards around the ghetto. Whoever tried to follow them just a few minutes later was shot at the fence.

The Judenrat called a hasty meeting at which it was decided to arrest a member of each of the two partisan families, in the hope that meantime they will pacify the Nazis for the time being and be able to negotiate with them later. Thus getting out of the situation it suddenly found itself into. In the worst case scenario they would sacrifice the two men as supposedly the two partisans, which they demanded.

Everyone in the ghetto realized that the Germans will not let us off with the delivery of the two supposedly partisans. But that was what they initially demanded.

After hanging around the Judenrat for an hour and having found out this much I went home to my parents, sisters and brother.

This time I did not have to be careful walking the dark ghetto streets. The ghetto was not asleep. It was swarming like a bee hive. The reinforced Nazi guards around the ghetto could plainly see it but did not react.

No one in our room was sleeping. Neither anyone in the whole house. My parents were too upset, too depressed and two nervous to be able even to sit down, so they stood in the middle of the room looking a each other and the children unable to say anything.

After telling them what took place in the last hour (not that they did not already know), for the first time I revealed to them the fact that I belong to a group that is planning to run to the forest and join the partisans. The expression on their faces did not change. My mother turned to me and said: If there is a chance to save yourself try it, may G-d help you.

I went out to see if there is any news. The Kobriner Street where the Judenrat was, was full with people, especially around the Judenrat. It was about ten thirty in the evening, half an hour before the dead line. Suddenly the main ghetto gate opened and a German auto drives in and stops in front of the Judenrat. Although it was night and Jews were not allowed to be outside after dark, nobody made a move or attempt to go away. I was wondering if we have suddenly become so brave or have we resigned to our fate.

A couple Germans got out and walked into the Judenrat. Everyone waiting in tension for the reason of this visit and wondering what calamity will befall us now. What new decree?

A minute later they are out, proud, arrogant as if they have just conquered the world. In a military precise gait they step down to the auto, the driver opens the door and salutes smartly. They pull away.

Before any one has a chance to ascend the steps of the porch, the door of the Judenrat opens. One member appears and announces that the Germans revoked the demand for the two partisans, for in any case the ghetto will be evacuated (the German euphemism for slaughter or kill) beginning tomorrow. The evacuation will last four days during which two and a half thousand people will be taken away daily. They even left behind a map showing which part of the ghetto will be emptied each day.

Immediately assumptions and accusations started to circulate around the ghetto. The assumptions were that the two Jewish partisans have been betrayed by a couple of non Jewish partisans that were supposed to have been waiting for them on the outskirts of town. The accusation were about the two Jewish partisans. There were those who contended that; were they good Jewish boys, they would have stayed home and it would not have come to it or if they wanted to be partisans they should have stayed in the forest and not put the ghetto in jeopardy.

The argumentation was solved the next morning at nine o'clock when four hundred sleds entered the ghetto. Those were peasants from the surrounding villages who told us that they have been ordered at noon the day before to show up at the ghetto fence way before the incident with the partisans. It became clear to all that the event with the partisans was coincidental.

We, living on "Nowa" Street were supposed to be leaving the ghetto on the first day, January 28, 1943. On the same short street lived my father's brother Joshuah with his wife Freda and their three children. For our comfort my sister Sheva used to sleep there. The others of my father's family, like his parents, my grandparents Kantorowitz (Kantorowicz), my father's sister Sheindel, her husband Leibl and their two children, my father's brother Hershl and his wife Sheinah, my father's youngest brother Eli and my father's two cousins from Malecz, Joshuah and Zalman Nyselbaum and their families lived in one big house on Rezky Street.

During that dispairing night, my parents decided to move or really to go over to Rezky Street in order to spend the last hours together.

How can one describe our feelings, sitting there in despair and mortal fear of the impending death of a thousand faces that was waiting for us. Yet I will shamelessly admit that my thoughts were mainly preoccupied with saving myself. Reasoning that if anyone of us has any chance it is I. I was a member of a group of young men which was preparing to go into the forest.

What chance had my parents, sisters and brother to save themselves? What went though their minds that night?

At day break as we were getting ready to go over to Rezky Street, my mother turned to me and said: run over to your uncle Joshuah and call your sister Sheva. Let us be together before we die. At that moment I glanced out the window and noticed my sister Sheva coming towards us. She was walking slowly and calmly, looking ahead, her face was pensive, I would say serene, as if she has already resigned to and made peace with her fate.

Despite the fact that I have struggled with the idea of having to die all that night, I felt a shudder that would not leave me.

As soon as my sister Sheva entered, each of us picked up the little bundle my mother had prepared and we walked out into the cold January dawn.

Walking along that windy cold street I went back in my thoughts thirteen months to Decemer of 1941 when we dragged ourselves together for three days on our way from Chomsk to Pruzany. Suddenly that dragging in that bitter cold and in fear became a sweet memory in comparison to this moment. Then, despite the fear of being caught, the cold and hunger, we could look forward to the eventual getting to Pruzany. Now looking at my little brother and sisters, watching as their little cheeks are turning red from the wind and cold, my heart was crying out to G-d, why? I looked at my mother and tried to tell myself that the dampness on her face is from the blowing flurries and not her tears. My father walked silently, trying to keep the little ones together as if to make sure that death does not miss them. Again the question that never left me since I have seen the first German cried out in me, why? Why do we deserve such a cruel end? What have these little children done to deserve it?

The ghetto streets were quiet. One could not hear a yell or scream. Nor a shot. There was not a single German in the ghetto but we could see many around the fence. Here and there one could see a person running across the street. Despite the fact that everyone knew when one will be "evacuated", and could postpone it for a day or two by just crossing the street, hardly anyone did it.

Entering my uncle's living quarters we found them all sitting together in one room. Their mood as our, trying to make conversation that was carried on with difficulties exhausting itself often and starting up with difficulties with an unimportant remark or statement. All in a futile attempt to keep away from morbid speculatory conversations like; Have the Germans already dug graves for us or will we have to do it ourselves? Or are the graves nearby or will we be taken to Brona-Gora? (a railway station between

Bereza-Kartuzka and Iwacewicze) where many of the Jews of Bereza_Kartuzka, Ruzany, Antopol and other places are buried?

During such a conversation I asked my uncle Eli, my father's youngest brother who saw action in the Polish German war, how long can a person go on suffering before death if a bullet strikes the body and not the head? It depends on where it strikes he answered. If it strikes a major organ like the lungs, stomach or even intestines the body has a tendency to develop a high temperature which usually brings with it a loss of consciousness. If the bullet strikes the heart, death is almost instant. However if the bullet does not strike a major organ, a person might lay in a mass grave in horrible pain for hours and even days.

Such was the theme of our conversation during that depressing Thursday morning January 28/43, when two and a half thousand souls was taken out of the ghetto to which my only brother, the 13 year old Liova (Leibl), my eleven year old sister Sonia (Sara) and my nine year old sister Leiba were listening. My older sister Sheva who turned twenty one five months earlier listened attentively to the conversation but did not participate.

In retrospect, nobody said much, everyone was engrossed in ones own thoughts which we used to say it aloud from time to time.

I watched as my aunt Sheindl, my father's sister, tried to explain to her fifteen year old deaf and dumb son Sioma (Shalom), that exceptionally bright, strong, red headed boy what was happening now in the ghetto and what will happen to us. I could see that he understood everything his mother told him. One could see it in his face, but his face kept on expressing one question that none of us could answer, namely why?

At about three in the afternoon people began to appear in the street. My father, uncles and I went outside to find out what took place during the few hours. Within a quarter of an hour the alleys and lanes came to life. People were eager to listen and share their experience.

Here is what took place. At nine in the morning, two of the three ghetto gates, the main gate in the market place, opposite Kobriner Street and at the end on Seltzer (Dambrowska in Polish) Street opened up and the German gendarmery escorted into the ghetto four hundred peasants with their sleds. They were led to the following streets: Cerkewna, Strazacka, Nova, Yatka, Gensza, Mieszczanska and Shull-Hoiff. They were lined up along those ghetto streets opposite the Jewish homes from where the inhabitants started to come out in silence. The women with red from weeping faces, the men with bent heads and all one could hear was the sobbing of children.

Six persons were ordered in each sled. No more but no less. Each person was permitted to take along a small suitcase, either a knapsack or just a little bag.

The bringing out and settling down in the sleds of the old and infirmed, especially when families tried to be together, the thorough final search of the houses by the Nazis, it all took a couple of hours. Finally the mournful procession numbering two and a half thousand souls started out on their final journey into the shadow of death.

They left via Seltzer Street gate. As soon as the last sled left the gate was shut. Half a dozen Germans took up position around it and nobody was permitted out or in, even a German.

The horror of the reality shook the ghetto population, especially the young of whom some still believed that the Germans are bluffing. Now with a quarter of the population gone no further proof was needed.

That evening there was extreme agitation and total confusion in the ghetto. Young people started to look for a way out. Many tried to get closer to the barbed wire hoping to find a less guarded stretch of fence. Unfortunately in vain, the Germans knew only too well how to keep Jews confined. At every fifty meter intervals, they put two men, one gendarme and one local volunteer policeman. They kept walking back and forth from the two opposite sides towards each other thus keeping their assigned fifty meters always in sight. With electrical lights on each post of the fence and pistol flares to their disposition which they used to fire at any sound, the ghetto was tightly closed.

It is no wonder that when a few brave young men fell dead at the wire while trying to get out, hundreds of others began to loose courage and hope. As a result collaboration and contact between the so called organized groups ceased. It seemed that each had to fend for himself and so it turned out to be. Those who had or kept the weapons started to whisper and scheme on their own and for themselves, forgetting their commitment to those that procured the weapons.

In reality one can not blame them for acting this way. As at that moment it was obvious that a group would never make it to the outside of the ghetto. If there was any chance at all, it would be for a single individual or just maybe a small group.

That Thursday night, I spent outdoors. To be more precise near the wire ghetto fence hoping against hope that maybe a watchman will get distracted long enough for me to get out. Now and then I used to come in the house to try and persuade my two uncles Hershl and Eli to join me at the fence.

Hanging on to the hope that maybe there will come a chance for us to get out of the trap and make it to the forest.

At that moment I did not even think of the difficulties that would await us should we even make it there. My thoughts were how to avoid the imminent death awaiting us from the Germans. My uncle Hershl has as of lately developed a severe back pain and he felt that he would not be able to run any distance. My uncle Eli the twenty nine year old healthy man who four years earlier went through the Polish German campaign with distinctions, did not want to think about abandoning his parents, my grandparents Kantorowicz.

That night , too, nobody slept at my uncle's quarter. The outside door was unlocked and I used to come in from time to time to find them sitting up exhausted from lack of sleep, but even more from despair and agony. If some one used to lay down and doze off for a moment, they used to wake up with a startling scream or cry.

So passed the night of Thursday to Friday, with the young people of the ghetto trying to outsmart the Germans and see how close they can get to the fence before being noticed.

Later on that night I heard that several small groups succeeded in making good their escape. Apparently a group of armed men managed to bribe a local policeman who let them through while his partner the German was patrolling and approaching the far end of their territory looking away from him.

As there were nearby many others along the fence that were waiting for a chance to get out, noticing the armed group getting out, started to follow them. This whole affair took only a few seconds when the Germans turned around. The local policeman noticing the German turning around fired, killing one instantly. The others retreated into the ghetto. Still, thirty odd young men made it out. Among them the three brothers Maletzky my friend Itzik, his older brother Nacham and younger Moishe.

This event took place at the end of Rezky Street on the very street where my family was spending their last hours together with my grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. As luck would have it, I was then at another spot along the fence.

In another place near the former Polish gymnasium another group succeeded in making it out. Among them was my cousin Lisa Pinsky with her boyfriend Yudel Rubin.

I heard of the successful escape of the first group within fifteen minutes after it happened. But about the second I only found out Friday morning having returned to my family after spending the night running around the

ghetto fence in a futile attempt to get out. As I came in I found everybody talking about Lisa's successful escape. I went over to my aunt Sheindl who was in the kitchen to ask if she heard any details. All she knew was that according to what she was told there were no bodies around the place the group got out. Then she turned back half heartedly to busy herself round the cooking stove as if to make breakfast, which was the farthest thing on anyone's mind.

And so past the second night of siege for the remaining citizens of the ghetto who sat in cold sweat counting the diminishing hours of their lives. How is it possible to describe the mood, the morbidity, the anguish that existed in every house, where ever you turned your head, be it your father, mother, sisters, brother, grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts, cousins by the dozen who only hours from now will be dead. Their bullet riddles bodys will fall into waiting for them gigantic pits some falling down dead, some half dead. The dead will be the lucky ones. The half dead will expire in pain and prolonged suffering either from cold, bleeding to death, suffocate under the falling on top bodies or will be buried alive.....

Nine o'clock on Friday mornings like yesterday the German escorted another four hundred sleds into the ghetto. This time they parked along Seltzer Street and Holender Street and all smaller streets and alleys in between like Potapuwka, Polna, Dluga and Cmentarna.

Before the sleds have began to be loaded some of the younger men started up a conversation with the peasant sled owners. They found out that they took yesterdays Jews to the rail way station Oranczyce-Linowo, twelve kilometers away, where they were loaded into cattle cars. What happened to them later on they did not know. Some of the peasants mentioned that on the way to the ghetto that morning they saw a couple dozen dead Jews scattered along a section of the road some three kilometers from Pruzany. They even described the victims attire.

The young men having heard the news slowly melted into the side street and spread the story in the ghetto. The description of the attire was so precise that some of the families could identify their sons and daughters. In that confusion I found out that among the dead were the three Maletzky brothers. Of course the whole story could not be verified but I nor anybody I know ever heard of those Maletzky brothers again. Nor of the others with them.

The expulsion of the above mentioned streets took place with the same German precision and efficiency as the day before. If any beating, cursing or yelling took place, we would not hear anyway being a couple streets away. I

do not recall any shooting. The Germans were doing a thorough and clean job. Besides, it is much easier to handle a living Jew than a dead Jew. A dead one does not obey commands.

Fridays expulsion ended at the same time as Thurday's. As soon as the last sled of the convoy with the two and a half thousand souls left and the Gerans shut the gate, people appeared in the street.

That late afternoon, I heard that some young men whose names I do not remember passing from Shershev Street to Kobriner found himself in front of the main ghetto gate. Apparently he looked very suspicious for the Germans did not pay much attention then to the goings on in the ghetto. He was stopped, searched and they found on him a number of detonators. They beat him up and let him go. In other times for such a crime they would exact a price in the hundreds of lives. Their action proved again that as far as they are concerned, we are anyway as good as dead.

This action only confirmed our greatest fear that we face the concluding chapter in the Nazi program of the solution of the Jewish problem. Still it is difficult to understand and appreciate the human desire, drive or is it lust for life, for despite all indications of the last two days and contrary to common sense, there were still some that dared to hope that we are being taken to labor camps and stubbornly refused to believe that we are being led to the slaughter. Adherers to this believe were among the locals. It is possible that the comparative tranquillity of the ghetto Pruzany in comparison to others instilled a false hope in some, or is it a result of a desperate desire for life in conjunction with a heart rendering cry to heaven; No, it can not happen, you can not do it!!!

Among the young of the remaining half of the ghetto population, new groups were being formed The not so successful groups were trying to entice new more dependable members, by claiming possession of weapons. I was approached by a young man from Shershev Reuven Winokur who showed me an impressive hand gun. I took it from his hand and pulled out the magazin in which there were two cartridges. Without a word I handed it back to him. With such an arsenal I would not feel much safer than with my bare hands.

Of my very close friends, all I had left was Kalman Kalbkuf, who was living with his parents and sisters on Rezky Street The other friends like the brothers Rotenberg, Leizer and Litek, my friend Meir Kalbkuf, all with their families were slaughtered in Chomsk and my friend Itzik Maletzky with his two brothers, I have just lost the night before.

Kalman and I decided to make an attempt that night by ourselves without any company to get out. We made up to meet after dark.

Getting home I repeated all I heard in the street which they knew already anyway. Namely that tomorrow, Saturday, the Germans will come for us. The sleds will drive into Rezky Street and some will park in front of the house in which my entire family is now living, and take us all to our death. We were hoping to remain another day, that is untill Sunday. However, there were not enough people left in the original assigned streets like west side of Kobriner Street, part of Polna, part of Seltzer and Browarna to make up two and a half thousand souls. Therefore the Germans will take in Rezky, Brisker or so called new Shereshev Street and the small alleys in between.

Who can understand what it was like and how I and all my extended family felt when I announced the above. True as I mentioned before, they knew and expected it. Still to hear from my mouth aloud the confirmation even though I was really whispering sounded like a thunder. Still louder was the silence that followed.

Maybe there is an explanation that I do not understand or maybe their heart and feelings were so numb from pain and despair that they were unable to cry. Whatever the reason none of them made a sound. They just remained standing avoiding each others glances. A little while later they started to turn away from each other not to look in each others face. A corner, a wall, a window, anywhere, was better then to look at your own hurt, suffering and despair reflected in somebody else face. The most difficult task for me was to see my thirteen year old brother Liova (Leibl) and the two little sisters Sonia (Sara) eleven, and the nine year old Liba huddled to my mother as if she could protect them. Without a word their eyes looking up to her saying all that their lips could not utter.

Having arranged to meet my friend Kalman, I told my mother that I am going again to try my luck at the fence. As if knowing in advance that I will not succeed, I did not say good bye to anyone. I took the improvised knapsack I made earlier from an old sack and some rope and in which already on Wednesday night, my mother put in my pitiful possessions of underwear and clothes and I left the house.

The lanes and alleys were teeming with young people that were even more desperate to find a way out than in the two previous nights. We became part of the crowd that was constantly moving from spot to spot along the barb wire fence. As more aggressive we became, the more alert were the Germans and quicker on the trigger. And so running around I spent the third night at the fence in helplessness and despair. I, a twenty year old man in the prime

of my life and condition, felt completely exhausted, physically from not sleeping three nights and being constantly on my feet, psychologically from the tension of the same three days. At times I felt like going back to my parents, throw myself in any corner for a couple hours of sleep and perish with them. Anything, as long as there will be an end to it.

With daybreak I returned to my parents and family. As in the previous couple days, they were fully dressed and looked completely exhausted.

In my lifetime I have seen many walking dead, but there was my first time and they were my father, mothers, sisters, brother, grandparents, uncles and aunts with their children. They walked around mechanically from room to room as if in a trance. They were supposedly getting ready for the trip. According to the German instructions, everyone could take along a small suitcase or a knapsack. They were preparing theirs as if they believed that the Germans were taking them to a work camp.

Watching them pack and their attitude to it, the biggest fool could tell that their heart and soul was not in it.

As the saying goes, "Time waits for no man," so were those horrible yet their last and precious minutes in the ghetto and of their lives fast running out and everyone was aware of it.

I stood in the middle not knowing what to do or what to say. Indeed what could I have said and what was there to say. In one room stood my uncle Hershl bent over a small valise that was sitting on a chair, arranging things in it for the trip. In the other corner over another valise was my uncle Eli preparing it for his parents, my grandparents, Yaakov-Kopel and Chinka. Suddenly my uncle Hershl still packing, started to sing, "Aily Aily Lomo Azavtony" (G-d in heaven why have you abondoned me.) Those words are not only part of Jewish Liturgy, but they have been extended and incorporated into a Yiddish song that has heart rending words regarding the centuries old persecution of Jews and befitting many dark periods in Jewish history. But if there was ever an appropriate time, it was then. If G-d did not respond, he must have been in a deep deep sleep that lasted a long time.

Through the entire German occupation and Nazi horror, I never cried. But the closest I came to it was then. I slowly turned around to get out of the room when I heard my grandmother say: They are taking us to the slaughter and he is singing. My poor unfortunate grandmother. The last few days and nights affected her badly. She failed to recognize that it was my uncle's prayer, a cry to heaven.

I left the room and started to wander aimlessly over the big house. Suddenly I came to a door which I failed to notice previously. The door led

into two large rooms which served as a hiding place for all the medicine that was in the ghetto, about which the Germans knew nothing of. Now it was not on shelves but knee deep on the floor trampled into powder and mixed with crumbled glass jars in which it originally was.

This was done by a few young men that were tipped of by the Judenrat of its where abouts with instructions to make it unusable to the Germans.

Those young men made a good job of it. Looking for other hiding places, they unintentionally broke through a boarded up door that led to my relatives quarters.

The picture of the destroyed medicine on which so many lives in the ghetto depended , lives that had hoped that with its help they might overcome the difficult times and maybe even the Nazi terror, shook me out of the delirium in which I momentarily sunk and gave me a push into reality and sobriety which I needed at that moment. Namely to make a final decision; to stay here with my dear and loved ones and share their fate or try to hide out the few hours and try once more at night to get out.

The decision was made by my mother who came quietly over to me and said; "Moishela, time to go and hide yourself. The Germans will soon be in. Then it will be too late."

I wanted to start saying good bye but did not know where to begin. Shall I start with my parents or grandparents, uncles, aunts, their children or the farther relatives, my father's two cousins, and their families from Malecz. So far nobody cried aloud even though every ones hearts was breaking and crying beyond imagination. If I will start saying good bye, the ready to burst well of teats will not shut off.

My mother noticed my hesitation and understood. She took me gently by my hand and quietly said; Come, I will accompany you to the porch.

Since my early years, I always felt that I am my mother's favorite child, if there is such a thing. Only parents know the answer and let it remain with them. How did my mother feel when she took me by my hand for the first time in probably ten years, knowing that it is the last time in her life that she is holding my hand, rather we will be holding hands in our lives? What thoughts went through her head? Did she think of the time she held my baby hand when I tried to take my first step? Did she think of the times when I was two or three years old walking with me on the sidewalk holding my hand to make sure I did not run into the road or when I was four or five and she led me to the "Heder?" Or later holding my hand to kindergarden? Or still later to Hebrew school? What was she thinking about in those few precious moments?

One thing I am certain of. That in her heart she was praying so ardently, so passionately on my behalf that it moved heaven and earth. Otherwise, I would not have survived.

On the porch my mother stood almost calm and said: Remember my child, you have two uncles in America. My brothers Shloime (Solomon) and Pesah (Phillip). If G-d willing you will survive come to them and tell them how we lived and how we perished. Remember my brother Shloime"s address. Here my mother said it out loud. Solomon Auerbach, 2133 Daily Avenue, Bronx, New York. I did not mark it down for two reasons. Firstly I had no pen and paper on me and secondly, I had very little faith in my chance of surviving.

As soon as she finished giving me the address, my mother said to me, Nu, Moishela, go my child. I was waiting for my mother to take me in her arms to kiss me expecting a flood of tears. To my astonishment she made no move in my direction. She just stood there as if petrified, motionless, looking ahead into the street and not at me. Seeing that I am not moving she added: Try to get out tonight. Should you not succeed, you will be leaving tomorrow with the last group. I am sure the Germans will let us live near the pits for a day or two before they will shoot us so we will see each other tomorrow evening. I agreed with my mother adding. Yes, we will most likely see each other tomorrow night, knowing only too well that by tomorrow night, my dear ones will all be dead. Thus we were thinking that we are fooling each other to ease the terrible pain of parting.

I understood that my holy and loving mother said it in order to make my leaving easier. Still my mother did not make a move. Realizing that she fears an uncontrollable outpouring, I decided to go. As I stood on her right side, I bent down a bit and kissed her on the right cheek. My mother did not move. Without another word, just hoping that my mother believes in our seeing each other tomorrow night, I started down the steps of the porch.

Having covered ten or fifteen meters, I stopped to take another look at my mother whom I loved more than anybody in the world and whom I will never see again. She was wearing a dark skirt and my aunt Sheindl's sweater. I noticed that my aunt's sweater fitted her nicely although my aunt was a slim woman and my mother used to be on the stout side. It suddenly occured to me that my mother might have been hungry many times in the last year and a half and I did not realize it. I also realized that my mother might catch a cold standing outside without a coat the 30 th of January and as long as she can see me she will stand there. Almost by force I turned and walked quickly away.

My mother's so strangely numb behavior during our parting puzzled me for many years. I understood that her heart was so full with pain that it could not bear tolerate an emotional parting but my mother was an exceptionally warm affectionate and sympathizing person, how could she control herself so well?

Many years later when I read Rabbi David Volpe's book, "In Search and in Silence" he says that in time of colossal emotion only silence will suffice. Quoting the Kotzker Rebbe, Rabbi Volpe adds that " The cry one holds back is the most powerful one of all." How befitting for my mother's behavior then.

Dear mother of mine. I have fulfilled your bequest. I survived to tell not only your brothers but I lived to tell their children and grandchildren. One more thing mama, your legacy is now being passed on to your great grandchildren.

My legs carried me down Rezky Street towards the little house where the three Maletzky brothers lived with their mother Brina and grandmother Yachna. A completely blind woman in her late seventies. As I have mentioned before the three Maletzky brothers managed to get out two nights earlier, but have been shot out of town. Their mother knew nothing of it and nobody was in a hurry to tell her. Now the hiding place we dug there had spare room. I proposed my friend Kalman Kalbkoif to join me, but he had no confidence in that place. Besides, he was planning on joining his neighbors who were living in the second half of their house and had a much better concealed hiding place.

I did not have to wait long. Seeing some men running by looking for a place to hide, I offered them ours. Soon we had more than we could accommodate. I do not remember who they were except the one from Shershev whose name was Reuven Hochman. A man of about forty and who was somehow related to the "Pampalach" clan. We could barely fit in. Brina Maletzky covered the opening with small boards and spread turf over it.

It was very uncomfortable in there as it was to cramped, the closed air and the ceiling, that is the few boards over head were too low. We sat one on top of the other bent down as far as we could. Suddenly we heard as somebody is shoveling away the turf overhead and then removing the boards. I look up and see my father with my little thirteen year old brother Liova (Leibl).

Pushing some aside I stood up and asked what happened. My father spoke to me with a voice I would never have recognized. My father's voice was always strong, confident even authoritive . Now he spoke to me a man with a voice full of despair and anguish as if all the Jews under Nazi Germany were speaking through him. "Your mother thinks it would be a

good idea if both of you should hide, maybe one of you will manage to get out through the wires and who knows, maybe survive."

By the time my father finished the few words I managed to straighten myself and notice that I am sticking out head and shoulders over the rim of the hole. Now I understood why it is so cramped and suffocating in that hole.

I glanced at my little brother and noticed that he is still a little boy, barely reaching under my father's arm. Before I managed to say a word, came a flood of voices from underneath, as if from a chorus full of protests and screams which turned into a jumble of words and shouting like there is no more room here for anyone. We are already suffocating. What are we going to do with a little boy at the wires and should we get out, do you think we will look after him? He will only be a hindrance. Or to my father they yelled, "How dare you shove away the turf from the boards to expose our hiding place!!"

To say that I was thunderstruck would be an understatement. Those were the same people that I gave them a hiding place which they desperately looked for not more than half an hour ago. Now they turned against me, my father and brother. But if they behaved this way, total strangers, what about me? Here I committed the greatest crime in my life, that still hunts me today, especially the first week after the event. I listened to the others complaining and yelling and did not say a word. True, I was no more the boss here, but at least I should have told them off. After all it was my hiding place which I dug with my own hands and I invited them in. But I kept quiet, why? Have I felt that now I am at their mercy? Why did I keep quiet? For that keeping quiet, I have not so far asked G-d for forgiveness. I do not dare, for in my brook I do not deserve it.

From the ghetto was coming the sound of neighboring horses. At any minute the gate could open and the Germans with the farmers sleds could come in. My father took my little brother's hand saying, lets go. There was barely room enough in that narrow hallway for them to turn around. I stood in that hole watching them walk out hand in hand never to see them again.

I squeezed myself back into the hole, Brina Maletzky covered again the opening with the small board dumped some turf over it and we remained in the dark.

Shortly after we started hearing the expected voices of the Jewish inhabitants, the peasant commands to the horses and above it all the voices of the accursed Germans driving the Jews out of their homes to their death.

Apparently Brina Maletzky with her blind mother have left their little house on time and quietly, for we did not hear the usual abuse, swearing and curses from the Germans inside, we would have. We could however, clearly hear every quarter of the hour or so a German coming in to make sure that there is nobody left. The reveberation of their booted steps used to shake the floor of that little house.

Around two o'clock that Saturday afternoon, there was a dead silence in the ghetto. We moved away the boards and crawled out into the day light. There was no sign of a German and a few Jews began to appear in the street. Many seemed to wander lost and bewildered not knowing what to do or where to turn.

That afternoon I passed by several times the house from which my entire family, immediate and extended was taken away. I did not dare enter it. After wandering around the still partly populated part of the ghetto which suddenly became so estranged, without a person I loved or cared for, with nightmerish thoughts in my head of how my dear ones will perish, conjuring up the most horrible visions that only the present reality could trigger, I found myself back near the Maletzky's little house where I was hiding a couple hours earlier.

Through the little low window I noticed some people inside and I walked in. I found there less than half a dozen Shershev Jews, among them one by the name of David. I do not remember his family name. He lived in a little lane off Chazer-Ghesl making a living as a horse dealer and a village peddler. With those two sources of income, he and his family barely survived. The second there was Moishe Tuchmacher. Both men were in the early forties, married with children. This Moishe Tuchmacher unlike that David who was a pauper, was a well to do man in Shershev with a big house in the market square.

The conversation revolved around those that have been taken and about the chances of getting out tonight. All present were single individuals who have lost their families in the last three days or even earlier in Drohyczyn or Chomsk. In general, the conversation was confusing. Everyone wanted to talk not having the patience to listen to others, hoping by talking to ease his own state of mind and the heaviness on the heart.

In the middle of that tumult, the door opens and in walks in Isser Gichman. A man in the same age as those mentioned above. A close friend of Moishe Tuchmacher, on the same level of respectability and who as Moishe sent off that very day his wife and children to the slaughter. The two friends seeing each other fell in each others arms. For a split second their faces lit up as if

they have won the lottery and instantly their faces twisted, distorting in terrible pain and both burst out in a heart rending cry.

Even though everyone present was in deep grief and ached over his own losses, it had to be difficult to watch the two middle aged men crying in each others arms. They, like the others in that little room parted with their families forever, deciding to spend the last night in the ghetto in an attempt to get out.

To be honest, it occurred to me to question if such an act is proper, that is to let your family to go the execution and try to save yourself. Yet I realized that there was no great accomplishment in going with them and the desire to live is immense.

Before I could give this thought any time I saw as that David that horse dealer gives a bang with his fist on the table and says in a loud voice "Now I feel better, let them know what it is like to be without a wife and children as I have been in this ghetto for the past four moths ever since I have lost mine in Drohyczyn."

In astonishment I looked at that man not believing what I have just heard and wondering how a man can even think such a thing, never mind to say it. This man survived Auschwitz, went to Israel and died there at a ripe old age and was brought to a proper Jewish burial.

None of the present there wanted to bother answering him. Everyone felt dejected, too depressed, too tired and maybe already indifferent to what one sees or hears.

We remained there till after dark when we went outside to try on the fourth and last night to get out.

We tried to keep an eye on three particular men. They were Yankel Winograd who was considered to be the tallest man in Shershev. A very resourceful man in the early thirties who went through the Polish German campaine and manage to come to Pruzany under the German occupation when no Jew was permitted to travel. He enjoyed a certain respectability in the ghetto.

In those last ghetto throes of death many looked to him for advise or simply followed him and his two companions. He was very selective with his company, one was a man from Antopol whom that Yankel considered worthy of him as that man was every bid as imposing as he if not more, the second was from Kobrin just as impressive.

Those three walked around the lanes and alleys like everybody else looking for a weak spot or a break.

The Germans understood only too well the mentality of the still remaining Jews in the ghetto. Knowing the attempts made during the previous three

nights which they successfully frustrated, the ghetto Jews will be more aggressive on the last night. They decided to discourage us from such attempts. As soon as it got dark, the Germans started shooting into the ghetto. Unlike the previous nights when they used to shoot at visible targets, this time they used to fire for no apparent reason, not to mention real or imaginary targets.

It became dangerous to cross a street especially Kobriner Street which faced the main ghetto gate and on the other end another gate thus cutting the ghetto in two.

Many believed that the best place to make a break was Old Shershev Street which was divided along its length. One side of the street was in the ghetto while the other side was inhabited by Christians. All that divided us was the barbed wire fence and cobble stoned road. Once you made it to the other side of the street, you could disappear in the Christian populated alleys. So indeed many attempts to escape were made along that street. That night one could find a group of young people almost behind every house waiting for a chance to get out.

Standing there I suddenly noticed three silhouettes running outside the fence across the cobble stoned street and instantly disappearing among the Christian houses. At that moment all I heard was one shot. In that split moment, I recognized the three men by their attire. It was Yankel Winogard in his revamped Polish military unform he used to wear in the ghetto, the man from Antopol in his Soviet style sheep skin coat and the man from Kobryn in his short coat, riding pants and high boots. As far as I know they were the only ones to have made it out that night from that spot.

Despite the difficulty in moving around we continued to wander from place to place exhausted half asleep from four sleepless nights hoping for a miracle.

And so passed the fourth and last night in the ghetto. With day break, everyone started hurrying to make decisions. The gathering point became Rezky Street where one could hear all kinds of suggestions. One proposed resistance, there were still a couple rifles in the brothers Nathan and David Kabizetzky's hiding place. Somebody asked how many cartridges are there? Sixty came the answer . Somebody pointed out the fifty armed German men that have just arrived at the main gate from the so called "Lehman-Gang". This was a special signal group, part of "Stergrupppe H.G." whose job it was to maintain the telephone lines functioning in our area. But above all they excelled in beating up Jews, although that was not their department. They

never left a Jew outside the ghetto without a beating. For amusement they used to enter the ghetto an beat up any Jew they met in the street.

Those fifty Germans came to the main gate to feast themselves by seeing the Jews being taken to the slaughter.

The one that pointed them out said: with the two rifles and sixty cartridges, do you want to take on those fifty, never mind the hundreds that came specially for us?

Besides men there were a lot of women in the street, many of them mothers. Hearing talk about resistance, many started crying, lamenting, accusing the proponent of resistance of trying to provoke the Germans to kill us.

These of course were local women who refused to accept the fact that we are being taken for destruction,. Some of my acquaintances were still talking about hiding another night and try again to get out. Other suggested to look around in the empty houses for food.

I do not remember if and when I ate during those four days. If yes it was very little. We ran into a few nearby empty houses. Most were modest as far as food goes. In some we found potatoes, or carrots, beets, uncooked cereal, nothing ready to eat. In a couple we found food that really surprised me, like sugar, fat, and oil. Food that I have not seen since leaving Shershev.

In one house we found a stock of Czarist silver rubles. For a moment we started to fill our pockets with it but immediately realized that it will weigh us down besides the jingling sound it will make. In my pocket I had some twenty or thirty marks, my father gave me and twice as many dollars my Uncle Hershl gave me Saturday morning before I left for my hiding place. I took a few silver coins and left the house.

Outside I met my friend Kalman Kalbkoif and asked him if he made a decision. He decided to hide in the hide out that was in the other part of their house although those people claimed that there was no room.

With daylight the Germans stopped the shooting and we were able to move around. We wanted to see the spot where last night the three big men managed to get out. Approaching the fence within two meters I shuddered in disbelief. There on the other side of the fence right in the middle of the street lie the three men, Yankel Winograd, with his two companions, dressed in the very same clothes we used to see them in the ghetto and I saw them a few hours earlier running across the street outside.

How did they get there? With my own eyes I saw them running into the alley across the street, already outside the ghetto. During that night I passed by this place several times and did not see them. Within minutes our group

grew bigger and some started proposing all kinds of assumptions. One came up with the idea that besides the line of guards around the ghetto fence, there might be another one half a kilometer away, which depressed us even more.

With such despairing thoughts, we started back to Rezky street, just in time to see the farmers sleds turning into Rezky street from Kobriner. My close friend Kalman disappeared most likely into his neighbors hideout. I had no wish to hide alone I the previous place. Besides, I had nobody to cover it with turf like the morning before.

I looked at all the men that spent the last four nights with me around the ghetto fence settling down into the sleds under the clubs swinging watchful Germans. Everyone is trying to sit near family, friends, acquaintances to spend their last hours on this earth together. There were many single men like myself whose families left earlier and they remained to try and get out. To me it makes no difference with whom I share the sled. My family left yesterday on their last journey. Still I react when I see Shalom Berenshtein approaching my sled. He is the one with whom I worked one year under the Soviets, the former Soviet soldier , escaped prisoner of war and who worked with me outside the ghetto till the last day. He sits down to my right and I find myself in the middle on the three seat board. I do not remember who sat to my left nor the three men behind me.

The sight of the entire families trying desperately to sit together made me feel painfully guilty. It was yesterday at this time that my family was being loaded on this sleds. They too wanted to sit together, have they? Or have they been torn apart and put in different sleds for that last trip? My effort to get out of the ghetto was in vain, I should have been with them, instead I have abandoned them when they needed me most.

At the same time I felt a temporary relief not having to look as those poor souls are now being herded by those accursed Nazis who showered them with curses, swearing, name calling, abusing words and above all clubs.

Only now I realized how "polite" the Nazis behaved towards the Jews of Pruzany. The first two days, Thursday and Friday, the expulsion took place in streets we could not see. Yesterday, Saturday when my family was taken away, I was in hiding in a hole in which I could hear little and see nothing. Now on this Sunday morning, the 31st of January 1943 the picture revealed itself in its entire grusomness and its horror.

Who can imagine what it is like, an entire family being led to the slaughter; grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, children and grandchildren. Poor broken Jews, exhausted after years of persecution, accompanied by beasts in the image of men who are treating them as if they

were the scum of the earth. Who can imagine, who can comprehend and who could describe?

It took a couple of hours before the caravan starter to move. The sleds from Rezky to Kobriner via the market square to Seltzer (Dombrowsky) Street. The sleds moved slowly one close to the next. Between each dozen or so sleds, traveled a sled with Germans who kept a watchful eye on the sleds ahead of them. We reached the ghetto gate, passed it and left the ghetto behind.

Suddenly an immense longing for the ghetto overwhelmed me. Everything in it assumed bright colors, even the Nazi guards at the gates seemed tolerable.

We were now in the Arian or Christian part of the town. I am sure that like in my mind, in many minds ran through the idea of getting off the sled and disappearing among the Christian houses. I look back and see some three or four sleds behind me a sled with Germans, their rifles ready.

We are approaching the end of the town where the snow covered fields stretch for kilometers. The last building is Krucel's flour mill. The Bolshevics nationalized it (took it away) from its Jewish owner in 1939. We are slowly passing by the wide open gate of its yard. Suddenly Shalom Berenshtein gives me a poke in my side with this elbow and says; Are you coming? Before I had time to digest what he had just said, he swings his feet out, gets off the slow moving sled and without looking around, walks straight into the gate in which a half dozen peasants stay looking at the passing by Jews.

I look with astonishment as he walks straight by the peasants in the gate and into the wide yard. Not only did not the Germans see him, but it seems that neither did the peasants as if afflicted with blindness. At that moment I called myself by the worst names in my vocabulary for passing up such a chance. It was not just an ordinary loss. My life was at stake and I lost it as if in cards.

After my liberation, when the remnants of our people in Europe were gathered in refugee camps, in Germany, Austria and Italy, I met a former partisan from Pruzany who told me that he served in the same partisan detachment as Shalom Berenshtein. I heard from this partisan that Shalom fell in the battle of Berlin just a couple days before the end of the war. Among other praises about him, he used these words; "He killed more Germans than you have hair on your head." I know an exaggeration when I hear one, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was a brave partisan. Honor to his memory.

We left Pruzany and are in an open field. The strewn farmstead scattered over the far and wide space seems so undisturbed, so tranquil. From my sled which is roughly in the middle of the caravan, I can not at times, see the beginning or the end. My eyes wander from the endless line of sleds, to the serene farm houses in which the inhabitants, the best of them go about their household chores, indifferent to the fact that almost under their windows, two and half thousand Jews are being led to the slaughter. What the not so good peasants think I would rather not say.

It is a frosty day but no wind nor a tiny cloud in the blue sky. I look upwards and wonder why the sun shines so brightly, looking at what is taking place before her eyes. Why doesn't she blot out her light and envelop the earth into darkness? A darkness as the place we are being led to.

From a distance I see a small village of a couple dozen houses. The village runs perpendicular to the road, so from a distance we can see what is taking place in it. A good part of our caravan has already bypassed the village. Suddenly eight or ten men jump off some sleds and run into the village. The column of sleds stops, some Germans instantly take up positions around us. A few go inside the village to round up the handful of Jews who were trapped now not having where to run. In desperation they try some doors but they are shut tight for them. A couple try to run into the snow covered fields but the are picked up easily by the German rifles. The others are being ordered to go back to the sleds. As soon as they turn around towards the sleds, they are being shot in the back.

The only one of those few men shot there that I knew was David who was known by his nick name "Palena". A broad shouldered single man of thirty.

We moved on. Roughly half way between Pruzany and the rail way station, Linowo-Oranczyce, the Germans created their German Ukrainian border. There by the road side were stationed a group of German border guards. They lived in a fortified dug out for fear of attacks by partisans. All one could see passing by were the four little windows above ground from which machine guns stuck out. That dug out was situated on the left side of the road, after which a pine forest began. It was not an old forest, nor a thick one, whose branches started 6-7 meters above the ground. There was no foliage of any sort below them. Still it offered some protection,.

As soon as the first couple scores of sleds passed the dug out, several dozen men jumped off the sled and began to run into the forest. As at the village, the Germans formed a chain of guards around us while others started shooting at the fleeing men. The escaping men were at a double disadvantage. Firstly because the very white snow made their dark figures

clearly visible, therefore easy targets. But their fate was really decided when the border guards opened up with their machine guns. We watched with pain I our hearts as one after the other, they went falling to the ground. The Germans went over from one to the other to make sure that they were all dead before we continued farther.

An hour or so later we arrived at the station Linowo-Oranczyce. We were driven a kilometer past the station out of sight of the local population. There on the side tracks stood some twenty five cattle cars whose little windows were boarded up. The snow around was trampled and the entire place was surrounded by local Ukrainian police supervised by Germans. The Ukrainian police consisted of volunteers who gladly collaborated with the Germans for various reasons. The things they had in common for centuries was the old innate hatred of Jews, the dislike of the Soviets, the quest for power and the search of self esteem, the irresistible desire to plunder Jewish possessions and the unsatisfied thirst for spilling Jewish blood. When it used to concern Jews, those Ukrainian volunteers fulfilled their duty with ferver, surpassing in cruelty the Nazis.

As the line of sleds kept on pulling up to the empty cattle cars, the Ukrainian police used to chase off the Jews from the sleds. If a suitcase or a knapsack used to catch a Ukrainian's eye, he used to order the owner to leave it right there. Woe to the one who did not comply immediately.

The peasants, the owners of the sleds too, tried to take advantage of the poor unfortunate Jews and benefit from their misfortune. Older Jews having sat immobile on the sleds for four hours stiff and frozen, had difficulties getting off of them. By the time they managed to straighten their backs or regain mobility in their limbs, the farmers used to give a whip the horse and quickly drive away with the Jewish meager possessions still on the sled.

Who paid attention to the screaming Jews amidst the crying, the lament of the women and the swearing, cursing and beating of the Germans. Besides, they would not react to it anyway, as the Ukrainian police relieved many Jews of their possessions in front of the Germans.

As I was approaching the cattle cars, I kept an eye open for familiar faces especially for people from Shershev. Apparently others had the same thoughts in mid. For within a wink of an eye, we were almost a dozen men from Shershev. Some of them I still remember, like the two brothers Shepsl and Itzl Pomerantz, their brother in law Berl Tenenbaum, Leibl Feldman and Ghotl Weiner.

Sometimes in early November 1942, right after the ghetto Pruzany was put on notice to be ready for "evacuation" at any time, I decided to look,

observe and remember as much as possible all that is happening with and around me. If that was supposed to be my fate and destiny in my expected to be life, then I want to look at it clearly, discerningly and lucidly for this will be all I can expect and get in life.

It is my belief that this decision helped me remember important and less important events from those days that many of my contemporaries have long forgotten.

I looked closely at what is going on around and saw that the Germans are loading five cattle cars at a time and counting heads. As the doors of the cars were about a meter above ground, some of us were told to put long boards leading from the ground to the floor of the cars to serve as a walk up ramps. People were walking up and filling the cars to capacity. The Germans were not particular who got in as long as they had the required numbers of people inside, they used to slide the door shut and seal it.

Considering the chaos, the confusion around, one could say that the loading of the cars was done in comparative order. During the loading I saw an occurrence or shall I call it a phenomenon which is worth to mention and difficult to understand. Maybe psychiatrists can explain it.

I, nor the other few men from Shershev were not too anxious to be driven into the cattle cars. So as long as we could, we were trying to avoid being herded in them. Yet I tried to see all I could to what is taking place around us. There were some heart rending scenes taking place in front of my eyes. As I mentioned earlier, the Germans used to count the amount of people entering or rather being pressed into each car. Having forced in the prescribed amount, they used to unceremoniously stop the flow and divert the flow to the next car. In that helpless and desperate moment families wanted to be together and indeed die together. How tragic it was when the Germans used to stop the flow of people exactly when a family was half way in while the rest was told to go into the next cattle car. No amount of begging,. pleading, or imploring could help. The door was shut in front of small children while their parents remained outside, or vice versa, in front of wives with or without children, while the husband was taken to another cattle car. Old people, sick people, infirm people who were separated from their families or care takers.

I looked with wide open eyes at the barbarian treatment of innocent souls being taken to the slaughter. Three and four generations to die together.

As the loading progressed, I suddenly noticed that some people began literally pushing their way into the cars, as if deliberately, almost by force. I could not understand it then nor can I now. It seemed that the German were

surprised too for one yelled out: "Crazy Jews, what are you pushing for? Do you think that we will leave you here?"

This uncomprehensible phenomenon, this unexplainable action I tried to understand and maybe solve throughout my life without success What was it that, considering the fact that this train was the only means that could take them to their death would suddenly beckon to them as a safe haven?

Here I too will admit that the shortage of space on the train did cross my mind and the prospect of remaining behind did not appeal to me. I also knew that the end will be the same Still I preferred to be buried with all the others.

Is it possible that those that earlier pushed to get inside the cattle cars had the very thoughts but could not control them?

Eventually came my turn to enter a car. At twenty I was agile and quick and was one of the first to make my way to a window. Although the windows were boarded up, there were spaces among the boards of about a centimeter wide. Enough to tell if it was day or night. Even to see some movement or objects from a distance. I positioned myself at the window surrounded by the few Shershev men. The car was filled up in no time. The sliding door was pushed in place, locked and sealed. We remained pressed together in the dark.

It took a while to get used to the dark, coming in from the bright sunny outside. Slowly we began to distinguish and recognize faces. Still one could not see further than two meters away. Whoever had family, friends or acquaintances started calling out for them. Others were calling names hoping that a friend or an acquaintance will answer.

In between the calling out of names, the screaming of children, the crying of infants and women, the groans and moans of the elderly and the sighs of the beaten up, it was difficult to talk. Besides, what was there to say. We all knew what is a waiting us when we get there and we knew where we are going. If the Germans have not killed us right outside Pruzany, then they are taking us to Brona-Gora, where they have slaughtered some of the Jews of Bereza-Kartuska, Ruzany, Pinsk and other neighboring places.

And so we stand, leaning one on the other, exhausted spiritually and physically. It has been four nights since I slept. I spent them along the ghetto fence, barely ate anything, possessed with one thought, how to get out of the ghetto? Now everything is lost. There is nobody left of my family and I am sealed in a cattle car that will take me to the same place and maybe to the same ditch in which my family is already sleeping their eternal sleep.

The outside noises are getting quieter and soon disappear. In the car is quieter, too. When an infant is not crying one can hear the footsteps of the guards around the train interrupted by a command in German.

Outside is dark but in the car is pitch dark. The train has not moved yet. We know that once the train starts moving every minute will bring us closer to our eternal resting place, but what life is it to stay here pressed together like herring in a barrel? Barely on our feet, inhaling the continuously heavier and more suffocating air that is being mixed with the smell of people relieving themselves as they stand on their feet being pressed so tightly together.

Finally one hour after midnight, the train began to move. First slowly back and forth then forwards west.

We were too tired, too exhausted and resigned to our fate to wonder why the train is going westwards instead of eastwards towards Brona Gora.

The train dragged itself. At times it used to speed up but not for long. We made stops, sometimes short ones and sometimes longer. And so we passed Brest-Litowsk in early Monday morning and continued farther west. In some still intact families there began to awaken a spark of hope that we are really going to work camps in Germany. Their reasoning was that if the Germans wanted to murder us why drag us so far from home when they could do with us as they have done with the surrounding shtetls and towns, killing them on the spot.

The last couple of months a rumor started circulating in our ghetto that something very bad is taking place near the railway station Malkin on the line Brest-Litowsk to Warsaw. Most Jews in the ghetto did not even know where Malkin is and if something bad is taking place there, can it be worse than here. We knew that we were like an island in the middle of the sea. That there are no more Jewish settlements around us, so what can be there worse than here? And so the rumor died down.

It just happened that in our cattle car was a traveling salesman by the name of Kava who used to travel to Warsaw almost every week and knew the layout of every station on the way. That first of February as we stopped at a station some fifty kilometers before Warsaw, that Kava looks out through a crack in the boarded up window and says: When our train starts up and turns right we will be going to Malkin. It won't be a good sign. But if we will continue straight, we will be going towards Warsaw. And so it was that our train went straight ahead towards Warsaw. None of us had known of the existence of Treblinka. Just past Malkin nor what Treblinka meant.

We did not go far before we entered a nice sized city with a large rail way yard. I looked out through the crack between the boards and saw many railway lines. Looking across to the other end of the rail yard, I saw a line of men all of them with their backs to us and on each back a yellow star of David. As I was looking at them I noticed a tall man and next to him a shorter noticeably older and somewhat stooped man. The tall younger man made a motion with his head towards the older as if to point us out but did not turn towards us. The older lowered his head even more nodding with his head a if to say: Yes, another trainload of our breathern to the slaughter.

This picture that lasted only a few seconds engraved itself in my memory forever. It told me so much. We remained standing on that station a good while.

Between us and the line of the Jewish workers, many freight trains and freight cars were being shuffled back and forth. After a while a freight train parked along-side us no more than twelve fifteen meters away, the locomotive was unhooked and the cars remained motionless. About a quarter of an hour later as we looked through the crack, we noticed somebody crawling underneath the parked freight train and comes up almost in front of our car. It is a tall man not what one would call Jewish looking with no yellow star on his coat. He looks back and forth throwing darting glimpses in all directions. We hear him say: "Yidden (Jews) save yourselves. You are being led to the slaughter. Break out of the cattle cars and run wherever you can. We were eight thousand Jews here in Minsk Mazowiecky and now we are two hundred left working on the rail way track expecting any day to be murdered by the Nazis." Having said it, he disappeared among the railway cars.

Again a tumult in the car, should we or should not we. At least we will die trying to escape. The getting out from the car is not the biggest obstacle. The boards over the little windows can be beat out. The jumping off of the running train is seldom fatal. More dangerous is the German who stands on the elevated platform behind each car.

We start hearing the lament of older people and mothers of small children, claming that they will be shot in retaliation for our escape.

The truth is that neither their complaints nor their lament was the reason for our remaining in the car. The real reason was that we all knew that our attempt to escape was like jumping from the frying pan into the fire That is, escaping from the Germans only to fall into Polish hands. So we stayed.

As we were leaving Minsk-Mazowiecky a group of Polish rail way men got on our train. Why the Germans permitted them to get on and to what

purpose we did not know. Those Poles positioned themselves on the buffers between the cars and tried to communicate with us. It is from them that we found out we are going to a place called Auschwitz, a name we never heard of. They, the Poles tried to do business with us. To sell us bread and water claiming that where we are going we will not be needing money nor jewelry. Their prices were a hundred dollars and up for a slice of bread and even more for a bottle of water. Others simply asked for our money as we will not have the need of it where we are going.

From our car there were no transactions with them but from our conversation with them many questions have arisen, like what kind of place is it "Auschwitz' and why won't we be needing money and jewelry but bread and water?

At about six in the evening we were passing Warsaw. From my spot at the boarded up windows, I kept on looking through a crack at the continuous rows of tall buildings, four, five, and six stories high. Every window was lit up brightly. To me they looked joyful and festive. Again the always omnipresent question hit me with intensity;Why? What have we done to deserve it? Here in front of me live a million Poles, judging from the brightly lit windows continuously celebrating and our destiny, our fate is to be led to the slaughter.

In deep despair and aching heart, I turned from the window thinking to myself that it won't make any difference if I will see a couple more kilometers of this brightly lit city or not. In any case within a few hours or a day, I will be dead.

And so I spent the second nigh leaning against the car wall. As for me I felt indifferent to what the next few hours might bring. I was too tired , too exhausted from the last several days and nights. With no feeling, simply numb both physically and mentally, I stood against the wall unable and unwilling to move or to look out through the crack for a familiar name of a station or town.

With the crack of dawn we arrived at a large rail way station where we stopped. As it got brighter we could make out the many railway lines that ran parallel to our tracks. Shortly after Polish rail way workers began to appear who knew not to get to close to our train neither to start a conversation. The only thing we found out was that we are in Czenstochowa.

After a couple of hours on that station the train began to move again at a slow pace stopping often. Midday the train stopped in the middle of nowhere. Looking through the crack, I could see a young pine forest about thirty meters away that ran along the railway tracks. The ground was covered with a pure

and untouched white snow, which was remarkable, as up to now whenever we stopped the snow on the ground was trampled and dirty. Maybe that was the reason that I kept my sight on that spot a bit longer, it seemed to me that some shadow or shadows are moving about in that young forest. Sure enough, seconds later I could see human forms moving in the forest and getting closer to the edge to our train.

The crack in the window could accommodate three pairs of eyes and we three looked on as some men in British uniforms appeared at the edge of the forest. They were close enough that we could see the inscription on their shoulders. With unbelieving eyes we read "Palestine."

Instantly the news spread over the car and whoever had any strength left tried to push his way to the cracks to see with his own eyes the miracle. We immediately started talking, rather yelling to them in Hebrew that we are being led to the slaughter. They in return not getting any closer kept yelling, "Lo, lo, atem nosym lichyot velo lamut." (No, no you are going to live and not to die.) Suddenly one of them left the safety of the forest , runs across the thirty or so feet of snow covered ground, pulling out a chocolate bar from his pocket and shoves it in the crack of our window. The soldier prisoner runs swiftly back into the forest to his friends.

A minute later the train started moving and the Hebrew speaking English uniformed soldiers quickly disappear from our sight.

The chocolate bar that our benefactor shoved into the car was taken by one that stood by my side. He took off the wrapping and we noticed that the bar consisted of little squares. Four squares wide and twelve long. A total of forty eight squares, each just over a centimeter in size. Those by the window decided to divide it among us, a square each. Needless to say that more than half of us did not get any, but everyone understood that it was impossible to cut the tiny squares in half.

This event with the British Hebrew speaking soldiers is still before my eyes even though it happened much more than half a century ago. It was not always like this. There was a time when I myself began to doubt if this really happened. In order not to interrupt the trend of my thoughts in the middle of this bizarre and unbelievable event, I will skip for a moment a couple dozen years and continue with this unique story.

In the camps we were all too preoccupied with our daily struggle for survival. There was not the time, will, or disposition to share each others experience. Each of us had enough of his own to think about and was not in the mood to listen to others. Of those in the cattle car with me the majority that even entered the camp perished during the months and years there.

The first couple dozen years after our liberation each of us survivors was busy not only trying to make a living but what is more important trying to rebuild his or her shattered lives, to let, rather to hope that a scab will form over the terrible wound with which each of us came out from the camps, from the six years long nightmare.

For us survivors life after the war was too strange to unfamiliar. We found difficulties with every step. The adjustment took up our enery and all our time. There was no time to waste on events gone by or for memories to share or reminisce.

It was in the sixties and seventies when I used to come to New York to the Azkara (memorial gathering) of our ghetto that we started sharing experiences. On one such gathering when I mentioned the story about the Hebrew speaking British soldiers I noticed the skepticism of the listeners. There were a couple men from Shershev at the gathering who were with me in that car. When I turned to them for confirmation they let me down. They did not remember a thing. During the later gatherings I looked for some one to confirm my story. But to no avail.

It came to the point that I myself began to doubt in this event, fearing that in those conditions and in such a situation I might have not been fully conscious or even hallucinating. Despite the fact that I knew that I am right.

Once while attending an Azkara for the ghetto Pruzany that took place in Tel Aviv, I met there a man from Pruzany by the name of Kalman Grossman who was living in Jerusalem. He came to Tel-Aviv to attend the Azkara. A couple days later we met in Jerusalem. As usual with survivors of the Holocaust, particularly from the same ghetto, we compared notes. During our conversation he mentioned that he too, like myself left Pruzany with the last transport Sunday, the 31st of January 1943. Without thinking I asked him if he remembered something unusual that happened a few hours before our arrival in Auschwitz. He thought for a moment then said; The only striking event that I can remember is the event with the Jewish soldiers prisoners of war. It turned out that he was with me in the same cattle car and remembered even the chocolate bar that one of them pushed in through the crack in the boarded up window.

To his statement I answered; Kalman, you have just returned my sanity to me.

Some years later arrived in New York a Shershev Jew, a survivor of the Holocaust by the name of Moishe Khidritzky (Chadricki). His destiny led him from Auschwitz back to Shershv where he spent many years. In his old age he managed to get out and come to the United States.

Shortly after his arrival he was interviewed by the "Shoah " (Holocaust) organization that is collecting testimonies from survivors. The interview was conducted in Yiddish and he sent me a copy to look at. To my surprise he too mentions in his interview about the Hebrew speaking soldiers.

Apparently I was not out of my mind then and hope that neither am I now.

And now let me go back to where we left off namely to the train on the way to Auschwitz. The event with the Hebrew speaking British prisoners lifted momentarily our spirits. But not for long. The complete exhaustion, the feeling of being closed in a coffin like railway car, the suffocating air and the apathy that comes with total resignation contributed to our delirious like state.

I would say that most of us in the car were in a stupor when the train started to slow down, giving the impression that it is going to stop for a change. I looked through the crack and awaken with a start. I see before my eyes a quadrangular one story building with two windows on each side and a leaning roof from each side to the centre. The building is plastered in a gray beige color. I see before me the very same building I saw in my dream two weeks ago while still in the ghetto. The sign on the building reads "Auschwitz"

The train does not stop just passes by and picks up some speed. I think to myself; How can it be that I saw that very building in my dream. The only difference that in my dream there was no sign on it. What does it mean? How can it happen? What sinister omen is it? My despair comes back with greater intensity than before. I have a premonition of things so gruesome, so appalling that the fear of that unknown transcends the fear of death.

The others in the car are indifferent to what I have seen. They did not dream my dream. Fortunately I am not allowed to stew in my nightmare. I feel the train is again slowing down and comes to a sudden stops.,

Before I have a chance to put my eyes to the crack, I hear already yelling and commands given in German. The barking of dogs simultaneously the door of our car slides open with momentum and a rough voice shouting "Raus" out!! Everybody out!!

The almost atropied bodies start moving. The Germans hurrying them on with screaming and yelling. In their hands leashes at which ends are vicious dogs baring the fangs.

Before I reach the door I decide for the umpteenth time to see and hear all that is taking place about me. Not that I should be able later to talk about it. No, for this I held out no hope. But to be fully conscious to the last moment. This is my life. This is what life has to offer me and I to accept.-

I was one of the first to get to the door. The floor of the car was about a meter above the ground and made a good vantage point. Despite the perilous situation I was in, I ventured to glance around.

Right below me along the train on either side swarmed with SS men. Many of them ran from car to car yelling like wild animals and beating anyone that did not move fast enough. Opposite our train some thirty or forty meters away, I saw a high barbed wire fence whose beginning or end I could not see. Beyond the fence I could see countless rows of barracks, all the same style, size and shape. Many of the rows of barracks were fenced off from the others by barbed wire fences. From the distance I could see many watch towers.

As soon as I jumped off the cattle car I found myself between two SS men with clubs in hand yelling "Able bodied men on the other side," pointing in the direction of the long barbed wire fence. Anyone who did not react immediately despite the confusion, received a paralizing blow from the club.

In my opinion it is humanly impossible to describe what took place there. The fear, the panic, the confusion and the tragedies that took place before my eyes. Men being torn away by force from wives and children, sons from parents, mothers from children All of it was taken place at once. Wherever one turned his head, one saw heart rending scenes. I had nobody to say good bye to. I could not even if I wanted to. The SS kept chasing the men to the other side. On that side our group kept on growing as more men kept joining us. The SS were sending over to us men from age fifteen to fifty. As our group grew, the SS men were trying to keep us busy drilling us in falling in, to five in a row. No matter how we did it, it was not good for them and with the help of their clubs, we kept repeating it over and over.

It occurred to me that the SS are trying deliberately to keep us men busy so we should not see too much of what is taking place all around. This reinforced my decision to keep my eyes open.

Looking around as I was running back and forth, I was thinking of what it was like yesterday when my entire family arrived How my little brother and still smaller sisters were huddling to my mother if they found each other in this confusion in this millieu. How they could have used me when they needed me so badly. I felt a terrible guilt. Yet in a strange way I found gratification in that I do not have to see them being tortured this way.

Those that could get off the cattle cars by themselves did so in a hurry. Others like children and older people were helped. Still others had to be carried off. The little suitcases or knapsacks that each took along from Pruzany had to be left right there on the train platform. The mass of

humanity that had just descended from the cattle cars were facing the SS. At the same time being pushed backwards against the cars along the length of the entire train. I would estimate that the mass of people was about two meters deep. All the able bodies men are on the other side, on my side. The woman, children and old people are being held in check by a couple dozen SS men along the train. A huge SS man appears. He is almost two meters tall and almost as much around his middle. To me he seemed to weigh two hundred kilogram. In his hand he hold a bull whip, at least four meters long. He goes back and forth along the mass of women, children an old people whipping them mercilessly. I think to myself; How can you beast, although in the image of man that you are, be so cruel and torture helpless innocent people before their death. Why can't you leave them alone in those last minutes before they die?

I see a tarpulin is being spread on the frozen ground and look in horror as SS men go along the mass of women and children by force tearing out infants from their mother's arms and throwing them onto the tarp. The infants fly ten meters in the air before landing on the tarp. They fall on it or one on top of the other. Some hit the tarp with an ear splitting scream. Some land hitting their infants little heads on the protruding hard frozen ground and are either knocked out or killed instantly. These are the lucky ones. For the ones that are alive, a much more gruesome, much more hideous death is awaiting. It was days later that I found out that those little pure innocent souls abandoned by G-d and at the mercy of human beasts were thrown alive in the furnaces of Auschwitz's crematoriums.

As those infants were being thrown, mothers try to run after them but are being beaten back by the SS men's heavy clubs or clubbed to the ground and dragged back to the others.

I look and think how cruel death can be. I no longer think or ask myself why we deserve such punishment. I only ask why death does not come easier and wonder how may forms and faces death can take on.

SS women go along the mass of humanity at random picking out younger woman from about fifteen to thirty five and lead them to a side.

We, the able bodies men are finally lined up in a line. At the head of the line I see an SS man. As the line moves slowly forward, each one of us approaching the SS man exchanges with him a few words. The SS man makes an effortless motion with his finger. To the right; you join the group that is forming to his right along the wire fence. To the left, you go back to the mass of humanity along the train. To join them in their fate which is not only known to the Germans but is already clear to us too.

Some seeing that they are being sent to women and children, realizing what it meant, tried to go in the opposite direction, namely to the ones chosen for the camp. Unfortunately, they could not fool the watchful eyes of the SS men who would with hard blows of their clubs chase those poor souls to thos condemned to death.

With unbelieving eyes I see some SS men pick out ten old Jews with long gray beards and tell them to pick up the four corners of the tarpulin on which now lie a meter high pile of innocent and holy Jewish infants from some of which their pure souls have already left their tiny bodies. With blows and curses they are forcing the ten old grandfathers and great grandfathers to tie the four corners together making it a hugh bundle.

I can still hear the whimpers of those holy little souls and the thud of the blows that fell on the backs of the old men among whom I am sure there were some who had in there their own grandchildren or great grand children. I wonder how can G-d look upon it and not react.

Yet nothing happened. The murderers went on with their grisly work. Only the clouds became heavier and darker that late Tuesday afternoon, February 2nd 1943.

A truck pulled up. It is open and behind the cab the rear part is surrounded by a three quarter of a meter high fence. It turns around and backs up to the hugh bundle of dead and dying infants. The back door falls downwards and the SS men order the tern old Jews to lift the hugh bundle of infants onto the truck. The old men strain themselves under the blows of the SS men. At first without success. But the heavy blows from the clubs win the struggle and the old men manage to put the bundle of infants on the truck. The back door is closed and the truck pulls away.

As soon as the truck is gone another one appears. He too turns around. The ten old men are being led to a side where a specially built step ladder stands. Quite an impressive construction which I in the confusion did not notice previously. The old men bring this step ladder over to the rear of the truck and the women, children, old people and those rejected at the selection start to get on. Within seconds the truck is full, the rear door is closed by the old men and the truck pulls away only to be replaced by the next one. Again the process of the step ladder is repeated, truck after truck.

Slowly I am getting closer to the SS man at the head of the column. The one that makes the selection. The closer I get to him, the more my thoughts were beginning to be preoccupied with my immediate situation. I, as everyone with me, knew that our life, or at least my immediate survival is in the hands of that SS man. It all depended on his whim. A couple more men

ahead of me and here I am in front of the creature that holds my fate, my destiny in his hands. He glances at me with an expression of indifference and even boredom. With the speed of a lightening rod, a thought goes through my head that I mean nothing to him and that with the slightest motion, he can send me to my immediate death.

Fortunately, he does not keep me waiting but says: How old are you and what is your trade? Twenty years old and a locksmith by trade. He makes an indifferent motion with his hand indicating the direction of the camp where the fittest were being gathered.

I make a quick turn left and with a dozen long strides I find myself among the group chosen for the camp and who meantime are being drilled by some SS men. As before the selection, a SS man stretches his arm in a direction and tells us to fall in. The SS man turns and we have to do it all over.

Our group keeps on growing and the lines are getting longer and the running further. A few more SS men join in to keep us moving and avoiding the blows becomes more difficult.

The running around keeps me too busy to be able to see all that is taking place, but I am aware that trucks are coming and going, taking the women, children and others away. We are all tired and wonder how long this will go on. Suddenly the SS man stops and waits till we all line up five in a row. A few more SS men and officers come over. One in command gives an order and they start us counting. Once, twice and more. They want to make sure there is no mistake. We stay in line not daring even to whisper a word. They, the Ss are having a little conversation.

I used the quiet of that moment to glance across to the cattle cars in which we arrived an hour and a half ago and I freeze in horror. I don't see a living soul. The cattle cars are there with their sliding doors wide open. The bundles that its passengers brought along lie scattered in front of the length of the train. But where are the over two thousand living souls that stood there an hour and a half ago? How could they have gone so quickly? They disappeared. They disappeared and with them their screams, their cries and their lament. All that was left along the empty train was an empty frightening and deadly silence. Who could have imagined that at that very moment their screams, cries and lament is being choked off by a deadly gas that is depriving them of their last breath of air....Who could have imagined that a human mind is capable of conceiving such a hellish device as a gas chamber in which as many as two thousand human beings, man, woman, child, healthy and infirm can be forced to enter, locked hermetically and made to breath poisonous gas until they expire?

Five abreast we were led into the camp. The entry or gate was quite unassuming and once again we were counted as we were passing it.

I remember my decision to try and see everything and try to make sense of it. Indeed as soon as we entered I noticed a well fed man dressed in a striped jacket and pants with a club in his hand mercilessly beating another man dressed in the same striped attire but this one looked like he had not eaten in months. An emaciated caricature of a man who attempted to protect himself from the blows with his weak clumsy arms. The helpless soul did not even make an attempt to run. Instead holding on to an empty wagon he moved with difficulty around it falling every few steps. The hitter kept on hitting that poor man even when he was lying on the ground. The unfortunate made a couple attempts to get up only to fall again under the blows. As we were passing I looked back to see what will happen. I saw that poor soul lying on the ground and the big bully was still hitting him. It was clear that he intended to finish him off with his club.

Such was the picture that played out before me the first two minutes after entering Biakenau or Auschwitz II. Better still Hell itself. As we proceed I see approaching a wagon pulled by two horses. The horses look well feed and the two young men on the seat with their distinct Russian faces look even better. They seem to be content for they converse and laugh heartily. I take notice of this contradictory observation in my first three minutes in camp and come to some conclusion

We find ourselves in front of one of the countless barracks. Its doors like a gate and just as wide opens in both directions eager to take us in. The barrack is ten meters wide and forty meters long. There is no floor, so the ground serves as one. In the middle along its length is a brick partition that looks like a lying chimney some sixty centimeters high and just as wide. Two days later I found out that indeed its function is both, to serve as a stove and chimney which never worked.

This than lying chimney served in the barrack as a partition. Along one side of the partition were two rows of desks. Behind each desk sat a man dressed in, what seemed to me a pair of pajamas. This turned out to be striped concentration camp attire. Some SS men were walking back and forth behind those men keeping an eye on them and on us.

We were ordered to stand on the other side. There, for the first time, I or shall I say we, came face to face with Capos. This word derives from two German words: Comrade-Police. They walked among us supposedly to keep order. They too were prisoners like us, but with a few exceptions, namely; they were mainly hardened criminals that were brought from German jails to

serve as trustees. Their task was to supervise the inmates using SS methods that is; with the help of clubs, shovels, pickaxes or anything that was handly and if nothing was available, they used their hands and feet to hit and kick the poor inmates.

The very first capos were only German condemned criminals, but with the growth and enlargement of Auschwitz, the demand for capos increased. This demand was filled with Polish inmates of whom there was no shortage with the needed qualifications.

In all due respect, however I would like to add that not all the capos fell into the same category. When it came to craftsmanship, expertise and other specialized work was in the hands and heads of the thousands of Jews that used to arrive continuously.. In the last two years the Germans started to appoint also Jews as capos to run unofficially those enterprises.

To the topic of capos, foremen and overseers, I hope to touch upon several times later on. Meantime let us return to my arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Here in the barrack all the yelling and beating is done by the capos. The SS are there to make sure the capos are doing their job satisfactory. Someone announces loud and clear that everyone whose family name starts with the letter "A" should step over the partition (flue) and present himself in front of a desk in the first row.

The people behind the front row desks are asking questions writing things down on questionaires asking again and finally are sending them to the desks behind them. The proceedings at the second row of desks is short and they are back over the partition to us but not allowed to mix with us.

So it continues letter after letter until they get to the letter "K". I step over the partition and position myself in front of a desk. Behind the desk sits a Jewish young man a couple years older than I. He does not look emaciated but his face is pale, actually white. I wonder at such a whiteness. He picks up a questionaire from a pile of them and looking up to me with visible compassion he tells me to empty my pocket.

I have on me the dollars my uncle Hershl gave me on the last Saturday before I went to hide in the hole and an hour or two before he and my entire family was taken away plus the few marks with which I used to do business outside the ghetto. As I reach into my pocket I feel the few Czarist silver rubles I took from an empty Jewish home on Sunday morning shortly before I got into the sled. I put it all on the table. An SS man notices the money and moves closer. The man behind the desks asks me with a stern voice, is this all? This is all I answer. While the SS man picks up the money and throws it in a nearby basket the man picks up a pen and asks me my name, age, trade

or vocation a couple more insignificant questions. Then one that stunned me. It was, what is the reason for your arrest? It sounded to me so preposterous that I started to suspect some trap behind the question. It seemed to me that my "interrogator" deliberately let me think a few seconds. Maybe in order to point out the absurdity of all the process. The questionnaire, the questions and everything else around. In a place where ten thousand people were daily put to death, what purpose did all those questions serve?

He looks around. Seeing the SS man went off he says to me quietly: I know the answer but I am ordered to ask regardless. He filled in the line, asked me one or two more paltry questions, puts the questionnaire on another stock, gives me a small piece of paper and says; step to the desk behind me and give him this scrap of paper.

At that desk, too sits a Jewish young man about the same age as the one in front with the same white face of a dead man. His desk is completely bare except for two sharpened goose feathers held together with a piece of cord and next to it an ink well. He takes the piece of paper from my hand and tells me to roll the sleeve of my left arm up to the elbow. He dips the feathers in the ink and glancing at the piece of paper tatoos on my forearm the numbers nine, nine, three, four, seven. The tatooing in normal times with such a crude tool would be painful but at that moment I did not pay attention. It was only the next day that my forearm swelled, but then I was confronted with other problems and could not pay attention to it either.

As soon as I received my number I joined the other tatooed ones. From then on as far as the Germans and camp administration were concerned, I was only a number and referred to as such.

The registration process took several hours. How many exactly I do not know for our watches were left on the desks together with the rest of our possessions. It must have been somewhere between nine and ten in the evening. As soon as it was over in came a group of prisoners accompanied by several SS men. They came with bags and began to fill them with everything they took from us. The money, rings, watches even documents. Having taken it all the inmates carried it out followed by the SS men.

We were led to a nearby barrack, told to get completely undressed and were shaven from top of our heads to our toes. As soon as one was shaven, he was disinfected by a man who stood near a big barrel full of some kind of a liquid. The men wore a thick mitten which he used to dip in the liquid and smear with it the entire body. That liquid had the tendency of making the skin red and itchy, which in return brought on a desire to scratch.

After shaving and disinfecting, we were led into an adjoining barrack which was the bath house, leaving behind all our clothes except our shoes and belts which we were permitted to hold on to.

As soon as the water started running from the shower heads, many of us started to drink it, as none of us had any water the last several days. The attendant of the bath house, themselves prisoners like us, seeing us drinking the water cautioned us not to drink it as it is contaminated. They told us that due to that water there was a typhus epidemic in the camp two months earlier that caused the death of half of the inmate population in the camp.

The bath house attendants were the first Jews from France that were brought to Auschwitz. Originally they came to France between the two world wars from Poland. As foreigners they were the first to be expelled from France. On the 16-17-18 of July 1942, they were rounded up and a couple days later were in Auschwitz, where they received the numbers starting from the late forty one thousand up to the middle of forty two thousand five hundred. Thus in camp they were pegged "the forty two thousands."

Having come to France from Poland they spoke an excellent Yiddish and Polish, but among themselves they spoke French. I doubt if they have so fast assimilated in France as to the point that French became their mother tongue. I would rather say that French gave them a feeling of cultural superiority over their former countrymen in camp, the Jews of Poland.

With us from Pruzany came a young man who originally was from Warsaw. How he got to Pruzany in the early days of the war I do not know. That night he was with us under the shower paying little attention to warning of the attendants and continued to drink. One of the attendants came over to him and slapped his ace. Instinctively the young man made a motion as if he is going to strike him back. We all froze anticipating something unpleasant. I glanced at the attendants and noticed that they too had the look of anticipation. To everybodies relief the young man restrained himself and everybody relaxed. We quickly learned that there you do not strike back.

After the shower, wearing nothing but our shoes and belts, we were led to the next barrack where on long tables were piles of clothing. Behind the tables stood some prisoners who as we were passing by in a single line used to throw at us a pair of drawers, an undershirt, a jacket and a pair of pants. Besides the couple of SS men there were capos and their helpers with their clubs, making sure that we moved quickly.

As one would expect in trying times so there too each received the opposite of what he needed. A big man received a pair of pants that would not get on

him, while the slim one had o pull his up constantly, or the tall ones pants reached half way to his knees while the short one had to roll his up. There was no such thing as to ask for an exchange, so we tried to exchange it with one another while getting dressed under the blows of the supervisors. The caricatures in which we suddenly were transformed were to say the least comical if not for the tragedy that brought us to it.

And so outfitted we were led that bitter cold night of February the second to the third into an empty barrack. It seemed that this barrack was assigned especially to accommodate the new arrivals the first night in Birkenau (Auschwitz II). Before we were told to lie down on the bare bunks we were ordered to line up our footwear along the flue that ran almost the full length of the barrack. We took off our shoes, boots and whatever footwear one had, lined them up as ordered by the capos under whose supervision we found ourselves now. They ordered us to get on the three tier high bunks and go to sleep.

Despite our exhaustion and the many sleepless nights, none of us could shut our eyes on the hard boards. An hour later in came a group of capos with their assistances. They looked over our footwear, picked out the best pairs, took them along an threw the rest of our footwear on one pile and as they were going out, one yelled "Get your shoes."

I came to Auschwitz in a pair of high leather boots given to me by my uncle Eli at the start of the evacuation. As soon as the capo yelled "Get your shoes" everyone jumped to get his, knowing that some will remain without any. I grabbed a pair of boots that looked very much like mine. I pulled on one boot and it fit perfectly. I am lucky that I got my boots. I pulled on the second but my foot does not get in all the way down. I looked around for another boot but the pile of footwear disappeared. Everyone of us grabbed whatever he could. Some as expected remained without any. I am stuck with a boot in which my heel doe not get fully inside it and I tiptoe on one foot.

We do not even bother to lie down on the hard bunks, just remain standing and bracing ourselves for the next surprise. We do not have long to wait. It is dark outside but the time is four thirty in the morning when one gets out of the "warm" and "comfortable" bed in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

We are driven outside that February third. Despite the dark, the camp is lit up brightly and one can see as clearly as if it was sunny mid day. We are lined up five abreast and ordered to march. It seems to me that we are going in no particular direction. We turn right, then left again right and so back

and forth several times. We finally stop some distance from the barracks and told to remain standing in line.

We stand there exposed to the sub zero wind with our freshly shave heads, our feet in shoes with no socks, dressed in a pair of drawers, undershirt, jacket and pants. No hat, no sweater, no coat, scarf or gloves. Our heads and ears take the brunt of the wind and cold.

Dawn comes at six and we do not move. From a distance we see detachment after detachment of inmates marching out to work. Meantime we are literally numb from cold.

In mid morning a couple of SS men approach us. The capo stands to attention and reports to them. We are told to march, and are led from one part of fenced in barrack to another. The entrance is simply a hole in the wires and we are between two rows of new barracks still unoccupied. The grund below us is clayey and the barracks sit on the same ground. We are marching along the two rows of barrack almost to the very end. On the left of us around the last few barracks we notice groups of inmates. A rumor spreads quickly among us that some of them have been recognized as being from Pruzany. But nobody is sure.

We turn left and march in between two barracks. We stop and are lined up in a straight line five abreast. Here the ground is pure clay and it feels as if we are sinking in it. I notice that the new man that is going to be here in charge has an armband on which it is written "Blockaltester" (block elder.) He is a tall well fed man in his late twenties. Exactly what his armband meant we did not know but we recognized him to be a big shot of sorts by the size of the club in his hand. He spoke to us in German with a very noticeable Polish accent. Seeing him having difficulties with German I was wondering why he does not speak to u in Polish since he knew that we are former Polish citizens. It dawned on me that he does it for the benefit of the SS men around.

When we were finally standing in a straight line to their liking we were suddenly ordered to squat. This is not difficult for a young person providing one remains in such a position for a quarter of an hour. It is a different story when one is over thirty five and is forced to remain in such a position for an hour or two. There is a limit to how much one can stand when the lower part of the legs become numb and the knees cry out in pain. A person can bear just so much. The desire to stretch the legs becomes a must. The so called older men began to do it and it was here when the Blockaltester came into play. Standing behind us he with his assistance the so called Stubendienst (room orderly) began to beat anyone who even tried to stretch a leg. There

were some that fainted in that position and were beaten mercilessly while they were lying on the ground oblivious to what was happening.

While we were squatting and being beaten, a SS man delivered a speech. All I remember of that short speech was that he compared a concentration camp to the military which is based on discipline. If we will be disciplined and obey all the rules, he said, we will be fine.

Most of us did not understand what he said. This was obvious from our distorted by pain faces, so the SS man turned to the blockaltester telling him to repeat it in Polish. After the blockaltester repeated some of the SS man's words in Polish, he added in a question. Well, he said, now do you know what a concentration camp is ? We, in all our innocents or naivete answered "no". The blockaltester, with a smile on his face, said "well then, you will find out."

We understood and took it as a warning but never imagined to what extent it is applicable.

While all this was taking place during our welcome speeches, hours long squatting and other so called "sports" in the camp language, a group of inmates gathered near us. This were not the ordinary inmates in the camp. The ordinary ones were working all over the perimeter of Auschwitz-Birkenau under the unimaginable conditions that existed there. Those gathered near us were the so called "prominent internees" in camp language. They were the capos, blockaltesters, stubendiensts and their cronies. A bunch of sadists and murderers that at times used to make the SS men look almost human. In short, the scum of humanity.

Those than prominent prisioners stayed there watching as our immediate supervisors or trustees are exercising us or in camp language "making sport with us", beating us mercilessly. They, the trustees buddies kept on encouraging them and advising them how to deal with us. From time to time some of them used to wade in between us with their sticks.

The few SS men becoming board with all this walked away, leaving us at the mercy of the above mentioned murderers.

In late afternoon we noticed a group of men approaching. In front walked a short man in civilian clothes, but the clothes were marked with red strips, jacket and pants just like some of our supervisors. This man too had an armband with a different title. It read; lageraltester (camp elder).

Judging by the respect the other big shorts showed him, we understood that he must be a very big fish. We watched him walking by slowly in riding pants, polished boots, stepping nonchalantly on the clayey ground. He looked at us with so much scorn, with such contempt that it made our blood

congeal in our veins. So this is the man, an inmate, supposedly like all of us, in whose hands the destiny of all inmates lie. As if to confirm our thoughts, he orders us to straighten our lines at five abreast and slowly starts to walk by the first row looking every one straight in his eyes. He stops in front of a tall man and orders him to come forwards two steps. The "lageraltester" looks at him and so do we. He is close to two metres tall. I do not recognize the man and quietly ask around. I found out that he is one of a group of Dutch Jews that joined us this morning as we were entering this part of the camp.

I glance at the Dutch Jew and see that the lageraltester stand close to him menacingly holding a club in his hand. He asks him; What is your profession? I am a salesman, came the answer. Poor unfortunate soul. In his naivety , he did not realize that this is exactly what the Germans are looking to stereotype a Jew, a salesman.

The club in the lageraltester hand came up high and came down with force on the Jew's head. Blood started running over his face but he remained standing. This infuriated not only the lageraltester but also those who came with him and with his nod they surrounded the man hitting him mercilessly. In a minute his head and face became a mass of blood and the big man fell down. One would think that they would let him go now but no. It was clear that the man was unconscious but the beating went on. When they finally gave up they began to kick him with their boots. They left the motionless body only after their entertainment when it came time to go into the barrack. The double gate-like doors opened and we were herded inside, accompanied with blows and curses.

It is not easy to imagine the confusion in the barrack among the mixed up, beaten , bruised and panicked inmates.

We are some three to four hundred men in almost familiar surroundings. The exact same barrack as in which we were registered and like the one we "slept" last night that conjured up experiences which we would rather not remember and questions like what does this night hold for us. We look around. The same lying flue which is called here a stove, along the length of both walls the three tier bunks. The bunks are two meters wide by two and a half long, the space between each bunk is about seventy five centimeters. The bottom one is twenty five centimeters off the ground, the middle one a meter and the third a meter seventy five. The bunks are bare and damp. I do not know if the wood is still green (fresh) or if the rain or melting snow comes in through the roof. I notice a small partition at the front near the entrance to the barrack. The ordinary door of that cubicle is closed and I wonder what is behind it.

After being broken up into ten to a group, we are assigned bunks. Mine is the middle one. It is better than the bottom one but we must sit bent over as the top tier would not allow us to straighten up. After a while everybody's back is aching.

The blockleader announces that we are going to get bread. We are told to get on one side of the flue. Some assistants so called "stubendiest" position themselves on top of the flue to make sure that no one tries to sneak across it in order to get another piece of bread. The clubs in their hands discourages anyone from trying. From the one side of the barrack we advance to the end of the flue, receive a quarter of a bread and go over to the other side.

This process takes about an hour and we return to our bunks. We look at the pieces of bread and come to the conclusion that we might survive on it. Despite the fact that we have not eaten for some days, nobody is hungry. Yet we start to eat. It is after we finish the bread that we realize how thirsty we are.

We are told to go to sleep. The shoes go under the bottom bunk and the jacket with the pants under our heads. We are not permitted to sleep with clothes on. For the ten of us we are given one blanket. As soon as we take our jackets and pants off, we start to shiver. We try to lie down on the hard and damp boards only to find out that there is not enough room for the ten of us. After pushing, shoving and wrangling we finally succeed to fit in the two and a half meter long bunk lying on the side pressed tightly together.

The blanket, no matter how we put it, be it lengthwise or widthwise, in no way can cover the ten of us and a struggle begins between the two at the extreme ends. Each wants a piece of blanket to cover himself in the unheated barrack, lying only in underwear on the damp boards. The name calling, swearing and berating goes on until one after another we start to complain of pain in our arms, hips and sides that came from lying on the hard boards. Individually we can not turn on the other side so we decide to turn over all together.

Despite our exhaustion nobody sleeps. About midnight the door of the barrack opens up and in come several trustees of the kind that welcomed us some hours earlier with their clubs and blows. They approach a couple of bunks and pull down the blankets revealing some of the occupants in pants and jackets. A hail of clubs fell on them. Their screams were unbearable. I notice that under some blankets others began to take off jackets and pants. The trustees or capos notice it too and began to run along the rows of bunks beating everybody, not even bothering to pull the blankets down.

Having satisfied their desire to inflict pain upon others and the desire of the couple SS men that came with them, warning us against putting on our clothing, they walked out. And so lying on the bunks and shivering from cold, we survived to four thirty in the morning on Wednesday, the fourth of February nineteen forty three when the wide gate like doors of the barracks opened up. The blockaltester with a couple stubendiensts, their inseparable clubs in hand stand at the doors. A couple more are at the rear of the barrack swinging clubs chasing everyone towards the exit.

In a blink of an eye we pull on our pants and jackets and shoes and we join the pushing and shoving crowd that is trying to dodge the blows.

We are finally outside. It is dark but here too all is well lit. All around in a large circle that takes in the few nearby barracks stand SS men with rifles at ready. I realize that they watched us all night and are in a bad mood. The blockaltester and stubendiensts want to placate the SS men by beating us continuously. They are trying to line us up five in a row "just so", but it is not easy with people that went through what we in the last couple of days. We find the ground that was yesterday soft and clayey, now frozen and uneven.

It must have taken an hour before they got us standing to their liking. We are told to remain standing like at attention.

How long can a man remain standing like this after what we endured? It was bound to happen. Somebody had to be the first one be it a move of the hand or foot, whatever. The blockaltester with his stubendiensts regrettably notice every move and the guilty one gets beaten up. The longer we stand, the more of us commit the crime of stirring or making a move and the clubs keep on falling over our heads and backs.

Two SS men are approaching. They must be of some rank for the SS guards assume a more dignified stand. Our bloackaltester warns us to obey his command properly or else....

As soon as the two SS men are near us, the blockaltester yells "attention". We raise our heads and stretch our necks like string instruments. One of the two SS men comes over closer and starts counting us making sure there are five in each row, says something to the other one who writes something down in his notebook and they are gone in the direction they came from.

By then it is day light. I notice that our SS guards are gone too. We are told that breakfast will soon be served consisting of tea.

We have to wait a long time before it arrives in metal barrels with covers. We still stand five in line. The first in line gets a red bowl with some kind of liquid in it which is called tea. He is told to share it with the other four in his

line. We are all thirsty and notice that the first guy seems to hold the red bowl to his mouth too long. The man behind him is not worried. He knows that there will be enough liquid for him too. But the fourth in line is worried that it might not be enough for him and the fifth is sure that there will not be any for him. He starts yelling, nu, enough already, leave some for others. Some listen to such an appeal and pass the bowl to the one behind him. Others continue to slurp. The last one or two in line move forwards to take the bowl by force A struggle ensues from which the result is that the liquid spills on the ground.

We are being dismissed after the "breakfast" to remain outdoors within the confine of the two barracks, ours and the next one. Some braver ones stick out their heads from behind the barrack to have a better look around and find out that in the next barrack are the men from Pruzany that left a day before us, that is on Saturday.

The more courageous take the chance to run over to the next barrack when our overseers are not around or preoccupied. We find out that in the barracks numbers fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and ours eighteen, are housed the men from ghetto Pruzany that have been selected for the camp. Each transport from Pruzany, beginning with the first one that left on Thursday, January 28/43 is in a separate barrack. The first is in number 15 and we the last transport in number 18.

I was sure that my uncle, my father's youngest brother Eli, age 29, would be there. Unfortunately I did not find him. After a long search and inquiring, one, an inmate in that barrack told me that my uncle went volunteeringly with his parents, my grandparents, refusing the German offer to join the selected for the camp.

Our overseer eventually noticed our transgression and quickly put a stop to it.

We were forced to remain outside without hats on shaven heads, without coats or sweaters. In order to keep a bit warmer we began to huddle to the wall of the barrack and one against the other, ten, fifteen or twenty men deep. At noon we were driven into the barrack. Standing on one side of the lying on the ground flue, one by one we approached the end of the flue where each of us received a red enamel cup that could hold no more than a third of a liter of liquid. A stubendienst standing near two large wooden barrels filled with a soup used to put the ladle in it and fill the cup. Having received the so called warm dinner each went over to the other side of the barrack. Some of the stubendiensts were standing on the lying flue watching and making sure

that nobody steps over it and joins those that have not received their soup yet. Woe to him who tried and got caught.

After we finished our dinner, we were told to hang our enamel cup on our belts for use the next day. As there was no water the cups remained unwashed and we were driven outside.

All day long we saw countless groups of prisoners going to and from work. Where to and where from we did not know. The camp was too immense, but their appearance gave us the shivers. We got to know those creatures much better when we became like them.

From where we stood we could see that we were at the edge of a huge camp and that the twenty barracks of which we took up four are forming the extreme extent of the camp. There were some building farther north but we had no idea nor concept of what they were.

Opposite our barracks to the south, work continued in extending the camp. Work continued on every level, from digging ditches, leveling the ground, road building, digging in fence posts, stringing barb wires, erecting barracks and everything else that has to do with buildings.

There, before our eyes was rising a gigantic camp whose extent we could not see. Along our row of barracks after ours number eighteen, was one more barrack which was empty. In the other direction westwards, past the four barracks occupied by us inmates from Pruzany, the over a dozen barracks were empty and inmates were working inside erecting bunks. Opposite the last few barracks in that row, some fifty meter north stood a low lying brick building with a square chimney of some ten or twelve meters high.

This brick building was surrounded with an extra fence despite the fact that is was already in the camp and was surrounded by one fence. This inside fence had its own guard towers which made it unique. The terrain between the building and its fence was thinly overgrown with pine trees of some twenty centimeters in diameter which permitted us to see what is taking place in that yard.

The first morning in that part of the camp which was later named the "gypsy camp", there was no chance to start a conversation with other earlier arrived inmates. In the afternoon, when the inmates used to pass by our barrack some of us succeeded in exchanging a few words.

Our first question understandably was; Where are our families? I will never forget the answer I received. Even though I did not understand it a that time, I used the same answer myself later on when asked by newly arrived prisoners.

The answer was given to me by a young man not much older than myself. Pointing with his finger which was attached to an emaciated forearm in the direction of the only visible brick building, indeed the one with the square chimney, he said to me; Do you see the chimney which is belching fire and smoke? Through this chimney your family went to heaven.

I looked at him not understanding what he said nor what he meant. At that time I thought to myself that he lost his mind. Which did not surprise me considering the condition we were in.

Before dark our supervisors appear. They just came out from the barrack where they sat in the heated small partition. The morning drill is repeating itself. We are chilled to the bones, our bodies are numb, but the club is an effective instrument and the drilling resumes. During the day the clay melted and we step deep in it. It is difficult to lift the feet, but the blockaltester and stubendiensten are generous with their clubs. We stay again in rows of five and do not dare to move. Its getting cold and the wind goes through our jackets and undershirts.

Finally a few SS men arrive. The same two as this morning are counting us again. The counting the so called appeal is over and the wide door of the barrack opens up. We are told to get in, but nothing is easy in Birkenau. A couple of the stubendiensten stay behind while some more are at the door. The ones from behind are hitting and driving us inside while the others at the door are hitting indiscriminately over heads and backs of the stampeding prisoners.

The nearby SS men that will form the first shift on guard do not stay idly by. They too are hitting with their rifle butts.

We are finally inside, driven to one side of the barrack and as the previous evening, one by one we cross over to the other side with the ration of bread. As soon as the bread is distributed we are told to go to the bunks. Everybody runs to one. It is not important who lays there as long as I get a space to lay down. Let it be on a damp and hard board. To lay down out of the wind if not the cold.

I do not know anybody on the bunk. Who cares. We at the piece of bread and share our experiences of the day. I find out that some in our barrack made it today to the forth, last barrack that holds the people who left the ghetto the first day, Thursday, January 28.

We speak in whispers, but we manage to converse with the upper and lower bunks. From those who manage to exchange a few words with the older inmates I find out that they too got more or less the same answer as I and are just as puzzled. A few did however manage to have a lengthy

conversation with inmates that have been here weeks even months and from them heard stories that do not make sense. Stories that I would have been embarrassed to repeat in order not to be ridiculed. Although I went through the two days march from Shershev, saw with my own eyes the two mass graves in Chomsk, spoke to individual Jews that saved themselves from slaughters in places like Drohyczyn, Kobryn, Antopol, Bereza-Kartuska, Brest-Litowsk, Slonim, Wolkowisk and others. All of whom made their way to ghetto Pruzany and brought with them their stories of horror. They came to save themselves but unfortunately as it turned out only to share their fate with the Jews of Pruzany and perish in Auschwitz. I and the rest of us new arrivals to Auschwitz-Birkenau knew only too well what the Nazis were capable of doing. Still my mind could not grasp, could not understand what is taking place here. Neither could I comprehend the reason why would the Nazis drag us half way across Europe to kill us here? Is not there enough burial space around Pruzany. Why should they take up railway cars on Jews when they are in need of them for supplying the eastern front? What does it mean to gas people by the thousand day after day in addition to burn the bodies? Unbelievable! Impossible! It makes no sense. Is it possible that they want to obliterate any trace of their crime? Nonsense! They are leaving behind mass graves of Jews near every shtetl and city in eastern Poland and conquered Soviet territories. Why should they suddenly want to erase any trace of their crime? Is it possible that they finally realized that they are losing the war? We Jews could have told them this in winter forty one, forty two. Although it was more wishful thinking than prophecy. Never the less we could foresee Hitler's defeat in the beginning of nineteen forty three.

Why than should someone come up with such a dantesque notion like gas chambers and crematoriums. Now they want to cover up their crime? And in general, how can the human mind conceive such an idea, how is it capable?

I will admit that if we would be told by the other inmates that our families were taken away a few kilometers further and shot, we would have understood and believed, but to come up with such a bizarre story is humanly unacceptable.

Finally we settled in the bunk with the conviction that it is a made up story by our tormentors to make our life more miserable.

The night went by in pain and aches. At midnight we were visited by our torturers who again pulled off the blankets to make sure that we do not sleep in our clothes. Again the bitter cold forced many to put on their pants and

jackets. Those that were discovered were left beaten up and bleeding. Very few of us slept and none rested at night.

In the morning the same routine as the previous one. The same staying in line. The same supervisors with the clubs. We got acquainted with a few more abusive words in German. All the trustees talked, or yelled and cursed in German. I began to wonder if the German language consisted only of abuses and curses. The same disorder at the serving of the boiled water with blueberry leaves that passes as tea and we remain outside leaning against the barrack wall huddling against one another.

Slowly we get used to the surroundings. Some venture away abit farther trying to exchange a few words with the passing by inmates. Their capos and foremen, the so called "vorarbeiter" interfere in our attempt to start a conversation with them but their anger they take out on their underlings the dozens of emaciated, wasted away inmates by hitting them mercilessly. I look at the clubs falling on the starved bodies and wonder how those bundles of bones hold together.

They, the unfortunate too are looking for a chance to sneak away from the hard labor and constant beating for a moment respite by hiding behind our barrack or among us.

Here among us we can and do converse with them. Again they repeat the story we heard yesterday about our families. We can see the sincerity in their emaciated faces. Faces that reflect bitterness, pain, desperation and a cry to be believed. One of those still walking skeletons sees the doubt in my face and grabs me by my sleeve and pulls me out from behind the barrack to have a better look. Pointing to the brick building with the smoke and flame belching chimney he says: Do you see that crowd of Jews in the fenced in yard of that building? You better have a good look at them for you will never see them again. With those words he left me there staring at the multitude with the yellow stars on their garments, while he went back to join his group.

I look, it is not possible to count them from a distance of seventy five meters. They are all standing but can move about from group to group. I Can easily identify an overwhelming number of children, women and old people. I would estimate them to be around two thousand souls. They stood there a couple more hours before they entered the building. I kept an eye on the building the rest of the day, but never saw one living soul come out.

Before dark we went though the barbaric act of being counted and driven into the barrack. On the bunk exchanging information of the day we found out that the Jews we saw were from Bialystok.

I believe that that was the only transport of Jews from Bialystok ghetto that was sent to Auschwit-Birkenau, the rest were sent to Treblinka.

As I lay down on the hard bunk I felt a terrible thirst as I had not had anything to drink since January the thirty first. In fact all of us were thirsty, but where does one get water. We knew that there is plenty of snow on the roof of the barrack and that the little windows above can be opened but it was prohibited to do so. Apparently my thirst overcome my fear of being caught, for I got to the window and came back with a handful of snow which I slowly let melt in my mouth. Regretfully I became thirstier than before. To all the inconveniences this was an addition. Thus went by the night of the fifth to the sixth of February.

That morning I turned twenty, according to the world calendar. The day started as usual. I do not remember if I got a mouthful of the so called tea or not, but right after its distribution the blockaltester (block senior) came with a list and called out some numbers.

Those were the numbers of some fourteen year old boys that were selected to get into the camp when we arrived. It seems that the Germans realized that such young boys will be of little use and decided to get rid of them. They were told that they are being taken to another part of the camp where they will receive better nourishment. There were about half a dozen boys in my barrack and some in each of the other three. This two dozen or so boys were led straight to the crematorium.

One of those boys taken from my barrack left behind his father. Father and son were from Hajnuwka and were brought to Pruzany ghetto with the rest of that community in the fall of 1941. As soon as the father realized what happened he broke down in a heart rending lament. It happened that the "Laageraaltester" passed by a few minutes later. To everyone's surprise, he stopped to find out why the man is lamenting. When he heard the answer, this man, the very same one that welcomed us upon our entry in that part of the camp by demonstrating extreme barbarism when he and his companions beat the Dutch man to death, walked over to the crying father and with as much compassion as such a brute could muster says to him; Too bad they took your son away. I will be needing shortly some Blockalteste and appoint you as one.

I doubt if his words were of any consolation to the crying father at that moment. But when the rest of the barracks began to be filled with freshly arriving gypsies a couple weeks later, he became a Blockaltester.

In an ironical way the event with the fourteen year old boys eased my conscience abit. The first couple of days, despite my own hopeless situation,

I was being gnawed by a feeling of guilt for not standing up more insistently to the men in my hiding place in the ghetto when they refused to let in my thirteen year old brother Leibl (Liova.) Of course there was the question of passing the selection upon arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau where no thirteen year old boy in our transport did. Now that the Nazis took away the fourteen year old ones, he would be taken for sure and who knows how they died. Have the SS driven them into the gas chambers together with a transport of Jews that freshly arrived? They certainly would not use the gas chambers for them alone. Did they shoot them? Killed with injections or simply slew them with clubs?

Now I knew that my brother did not have to confront death alone as he would have should he have been with me. At least he was with his parents and sisters, undressed together, walked into the gas chamber together and most likely clung to them to his last breath.

Regarding the bereaved father in our barrack, I would say that the Lageraltester in a very rare instance of compassion most likely saved his life. By promoting him to Blockaltester he raised him to the highest position in camp an inmate can achieve, second only to himself, assuring him with all the food he wants and protection from any other inmate.

I found out after the war that this man came out alive from that hell, which was an accomplishment in itself, especially for a man his age.

Frankly I wonder sometimes what moved that murdered, that Lageraltester, to have compassion with that unfortunate father and to want to relieve his pain in a place and a time when ten thousand lives were being put out daily and to which task he contributed his help.

And so went by the day, the sixth of February, my twentieth birthday..

Our midday meal used to consist of a cup full of soup. Every second day, the alternate days, we used to get half a cup of soup and two or three boiled potatoes. As the number of inmates increased in our part of the camp, the soup and potatoes began to be delivered in wooden barrels loaded on a wagon and pulled by inmates. Due to the clayey ground, the wagon used to stop some hundred meters away from the barracks and we had to go and bring them by hand. Four men were needed to carry a barrel of boiling hot soup over clayey clinging ground, making sure that it does not spill.

For constantly starving men and comfort of our bunks, it was hard work but it had benefits too. Somehow many of us manage to get spoons, while carrying the soup one could hold the bottom of the barrel with one hand while with the other try to skim off some scalding hot soup and gulp it down, providing the accompanying Stubendienst is not watching.

For the dozen or so men that used to be picked to carry the barrels the days we used to get potatoes were better. It is much easier to throw a potato in the mouth, even a hot one than try to bring a spoon full of liquid to your mouth while carrying a heavy barrel on a treacherous terrain. One can also put a couple potatoes in the pocket and hope that he will not be searched when they bring the barrel into the barrack.

Unfortunately I was only picked a coupe of times to carry the barrels during which time I succeeded in slipping some potatoes in my pocket. By that time our thirst was replaced by a gnawing hunger and the few potatoes did not satisfy it.

One morning a week or so after our arrival, right after receiving our "tea", when as a rule we used to be dismissed and permitted to hug the wall and press against each other for warmth, we were told to remain standing in line. After a long wait we were approached by a small group of inmates accompanied by two SS men. The inmates were dressed in standard camp uniform but it looked much better on them as if made to their specifications. We were told to open our mouths and stick the tongues out. The well dressed inmates paraded by each row looking at our tongues, one of them marking down the numbers pointed out by the others.

After they left the Blockaltester called out the written down numbers, getting them together, he led the ten men away.

Shortly after, we found out that those well dressed inmates were Polish doctors who worked in the "Krankenbau" (camp hospital). Part of their job was to weed out anyone suspected of being sick, which they did by glancing at our tongues. Two hours later we found out that those men were led to one of the crematoriums.

That selecting committee began to return twice a week, never leaving empty handed, that is to say always writing down some numbers.

We constantly kept an eye on crematorium number three as it was the closet to our barracks and very much exposed in our direction. It was some two weeks after our arrival that we noticed the yard of the crematorium full with people, more than we ever seen before. We watched as part of the crowd is being driven inside, but many remained outside. They were still there when we were driven inside the barrack for the night. Even the next morning when after being counted and the "famous" tea, it took a couple hours until they were driven inside. Poor, wretched, pitiful holy Jewish souls had to spend the bitter cold night outside. In their merciful ignorance they must have spent the entire night praying to be let inside not knowing that for them death is waiting with open arms.

Here I would like to remark that although the official date of starting up crematorium number three is end of April and beginning of May 1943, the referred to crematorium was functioning "Full Blast" when we entered the part of Birkenau (Auschwitz No. 2) later called the Gypsy camp, in the beginning of February 1943. To this fact can attest everyone who came to Auschwitz from ghetto Pruzany and spent the first six horrible weeks with me there.

As difficult as it was to put up with the hunger, cold and beating, the blatant stealing of our food by our overseer, that is the Blockaltester and Stubendiensts was unbearable. We watched with envy as they filled up for themselves bowls full of soup and by cutting the bread in quarters they take out a thick slice from the middle of each loaf. While we had to share one blanket between ten, the Stubendiensts that slept in the barrack with us, had several blankets each.

A few daring young men in our barracks managed to get a hold of one of their blankets, cutting it into meter long and half meter wide pieces, they wrapped those pieces around their upper parts of the bodies pulling their under shirts over it.

It did not take long for our overseers to find out and a search began. A couple managed to discard the blanket pieces before the searchers got to them, but those that were caught were beaten, their wrists were tied behind their backs, a rope was passed over that tie and they were pulled up and let hanging from a barrack beam. They screamed then cried and begged until they fainted. It was then that they were taken down. What happened to them afterwards I really do not remember.

One morning we were driven out in a downpour. It was so bad that the SS men that used to conduct the twice daily "Appeal" (roll call) and counting, told us to get back inside. The half a dozen or so men from Shershev in our barrack tried to keep together. Those were the same men that traveled with me in the same cattle car. I will mention again those that I remember. They were: Gotl Weiner, the brothers Shepsl and Itzl Pomeranietz, their brother-in-law Berl Tenenbaum and their cousin Leibl Feldman. The other couple I do not remember.

During the appeal (roll call) which lasted that time not much more than fifteen twenty minutes, we got soaked through. So we stood in the barrack dripping water, being grateful to somebody for not having to stay outside. Suddenly I heard a subdued voice saying "Moishe". I turn around and see Gotl Weiner. He motions with his head to follow him. We come to a corner in between two bunks. There on the bottom bunk sat the few Shershev men

staring at a red bowl. I bend over closer to see in the dim light and see the bowl is full of potatoe peels, the thin skin that comes off boiled potatoes.

Gotl gives a nod and everybody's hand reaches out to it. The potato peels were lying overnight outdoors on the ground and in the rain. It absorbed it all, the rain water and the tiny little stones from the ground that cracked between our teeth, but we ate it anyway. I found out that Gotl took a chance when the Stubendienst was looking the other way. He grabbed a bowl, scooped up the potatoe peels and brought it into the barrack. We were grateful for the treat.

In mid February we were all moved to the next neighboring barrack. That is from our number eighteen to nineteen. So were all the other three barracks that held the men from Pruzany. I made sure that I got a bunk not too close to the rear of the barrack where two large wooden containers stayed for use as toilettes during the night. As the containers were open, they used to smell up the rear part of the barrack. Every morning those that slept near it had the job of carrying those containers out and emptying them in the public outhouse.

Taking in consideration the many cases of dysentery and the state of the inmates, one will understand that that part of the barrack did not present a pretty nor pleasant picture. Still, those that used to spend in the vicinity a couple of nights got used to it and did not mind the offensive smell. In fact, it had an advantage. As the stubendeinsts were not anxious to visit that part of the barrack, the inmates in that corner were left alone. I never visited that corner. Urinating as most of us did outdoors and the only time I had a bowel movements in the six weeks I spent in Birkenau, I managed to do it outdoors.

After the middle of February it got a touch warmer. Enough to change the frequent snow squalls during the day into light rain which softened the ground around the barrack even more.

Who gave the order or who thought of it nobody knew, but a couple days after we were moved to the next barracks, after the appeal (roll call), we were ordered to remain in line. Our Stubendiensten lined us up in a single line, led us to a mount of brick, where we were told each to stock up five bricks one on top of the other, pick them up from the bottom and so holding them in front of us to start walking in a single line. Eventually we formed a large oval walking behind each other. There was no beating or yelling. We just continued to walk. At first it was not difficult and made no sense. By the time noon came around, it became tiresome.

We halted for our cup full of soup and after finishing it continued with the bricks. By the end of the day, we were good and tired.

Because of the warmer temperature and rain showers, the ground around the barrack, especially where we used to fall in for the appeal (roll call), became a clayey swamp and we had to stay a foot deep in it twice a day, morning and night for an average of two hours each time.

It occurred to our Blockaltester, the same big, well fed Pole that gave us the memorable welcome a couple weeks earlier, that if a hole will be dug in the middle of the ground, the water will drain in the hole and the place will get dry.

There was never a shortage of shovels in Auschwitz. He picked some men and a hole was dug. Two meters by two meters and two meters deep. The Blockaltester did not take in consideration the fact, or maybe he did not know that water does not flow freely through clay.

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Chapter 11

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Since we started to carry bricks we were also made to carry sand. We were told to put on our jackets backwards, that is with the front to be buttoned in the back thus forming a kind of apron in front. We were led to a mount of sand, holding out the bottom of the jacket, a couple shovels of sand were dumped in it. And so we used to walk with the sand all day long. Although the sand was not heavier than the bricks, maybe even lighter, never the less we were just as exhausted as from carrying the bricks.

The clayey ground refused to part with its water even though the two meter deep hole we dug was half full. The Lageraltester (camp elder) in person came to examine the situation. He called together the three Blockaltesters from the nearby blocks who too had the same problem. They all decided that instead of us walking around all day with sand which serves no useful purpose, we should go to the mount of sand and dump it on the appell grounds.

The next morning right after the appell (roll call), we were told to put our jackets backwards, go to the sand heap, bring the sand and dump it on the appell ground. The Blockaltester said that he wants it finished by two o'clock. Nobody hurried us nor chased us, so we continued at the speed of the days before, which was relatively slow.

Two o'clock came and we were far from finished. It seemed that in the last few days we were lulled into a state of complacency, from which we had been brutally awakened that afternoon.

At two o'clock the Lageraltester (camp elder) appeared. He looked at the appell ground and said something to our Blockaltester (block elder) who in turn called together his assistants the Stubendiensts and gave them some kind of an order. They dispersed over the camp and were back shortly with capos, vorarbeiter and stubendients. This group had an ominous look about them which they did not even try to hide. They spoke among themselves with anticipation looking at us with contempt as they started to break the handles off the shovels.

We, standing in a long line five deep were wondering why they are breaking perfectly good shovels. It became clear to us as soon as they started swinging the long shovel handles. They lined themselves along both sides of

the muddy road from our barrack to the sand mount. Leaving a space of three meters between them they impatiently started swinging the sticks again.

We were ordered to squat. The Blockaltester says to us; I told you to have it finished by two o'clock and you did not, so now you will get your punishment. He ordered the first line of men to stand up and yelled : Run for sand.

The approximately sixty-seventy men of the first row set off between the two rows of overseers who stood with their sticks held high. They run with bent heads and shoulders over which sticks were falling relentlessly. At the sand mount they receive one or two shovels full of sand and run back. The running back is much more difficult than getting there. The road is narrow strewn with piles of sand, heaps of brick and stones, plus other discarded pieces of building materials. Woe to him who spills the sand or falls. But even those that do not fall get beaten just the same.

I squat and think to myself; considering that the seventy men have to keep running approximately one hundred meters in each direction being beaten by several dozen overseers who do not care where their sticks fall, how long can it go on?

The answer comes soon. I can see some with bleeding heads and faces, bleeding knees and legs from falling over heaps of bricks or sharp rocks, over strewn construction wood pieces with their protruding nails and other sharp objects. Quite a few are already limping but running out of fear that to fall might spell death.

It lasts for half an hour and it is obvious that at any moment they will start falling and will not get up. The Blockaltester calls a halt. They are driven together. A beaten, bleeding with sweat and blood soaked mass. They collapse unable to catch their breath. The Blockaltester commands the second line to stand up from their squatting position and take their place. They too get the same treatment as the first ones. I wonder, how long can those overseers keep it up. Do they not get tired? The question occurs to me if I will be able to take it and I shiver. The hours squatting will not be of any help in running. My legs are already numb from squating. Among the ones that just went through it are some that are laying motionless. Will I make it?

The second line has finished and they are not in any better shape than the first ones. They fall down in the same state as the others. The Blockaltester steps in front of us and I am bracing myself for his command to the third line. I am in the fourth line and by the time they will return I will not be able to move. Instead he says to us; look at your comrades and remember that if

you will not obey orders this is only a sample of what will happen to you and now get up and finish your work.

Two hours later when we were lining up for the appell (roll call) we stood on a dry sandy ground.

The next morning when we were driven out to the appell and tea, we carried out the dead that died overnight as it was done every morning, except that every morning there were one or two dead, never more than five. That morning we carried out twenty eight. The result of the previous day's treatment.

Despite the fact that the number of inmates in our and nearby three barrack kept getting smaller, as a result of undescribable hunger, malnutrition, cold, beatings, non-existent medical help nor sanitary facilities, the camp administration did not replace them with other newly arrived inmates. We found out that the camp administration intended to keep our four barracks quarantined for six weeks and from here to send us to another camp to work.

In the later part of February one of the Stubendiensts in our barrack announced that we are going to get washed. We have not washed since the first day of our arrival when we where shaven, disinfected, showered, given underwear, jackets and pants. In fact we had not even seen water except the so called tea or the dirty puddles on the ground.

We were led to the very first two barracks in our row of the twenty barraks near the entrance through which we were brought to this part of the camp. It turned out that the very first two barracks are actually public outhouses and wash rooms. At first all I could see was an empty barrack with the inevitable flue that stretched the full length of the barrack. Half way between the flue and the wall and just as long on either side of the flue stretched a wooden box of some fifty centimeters high and seventy five wide. On top of the box every seventy five centimeters in two rows were round holes of twenty centimeters in diameter. On the two long walls of the barrack at a meter off the ground were fastened wooden troughs of twenty five centimeters width and depth which held cold water. We were divided in groups of fifty, ordered to take off the jackets and undershirts and get washed, of course without soap. I was in the third or fourth group and when I got to the troughs the water in it was so cloudy that I could not see the bottom through fifteen centimeters of water. Before I even stuck my hands in the water, I asked someone the meaning of the long wooden box with the holes in it. The man just said; look in there. I walked over bringing my face closer to a hole. Before I even got to it I smelled it. Still I looked in and saw the deep long hole in the ground and the boards that held the earth from

falling in. I estimated the amount of the round holes to be between sixty and eighty. If there are so many toilet seats in this part of the camp, how many prisoners do the Nazis intend to squeeze into it, I thought to myself.

I still remember how disgusting it was for me to stick my hands into the trough after examining the very public toilet. But I did and even splashed some of the murky water on my face. Without towels I wiped my face with my lice infested undershirt and pulled it on, as I was cold. Besides, the shirt would dry on me sooner. At the same time remarking to someone near me that I feel dirtier now than before.

For the record I will mention that at that time after about three weeks in there, we were all without exception lice ridden. It is only a wonder that someone did not contract typhoid fever which would have meant the end of most of us.

A couple days after our washing process, right after the morning appell (roll call) as soon as the SS men left, leaving us to the supervision of our overseers, we were surrounded by the Stubendiensten who conducted a thorough search of everyone of us. What they were looking for we did not know. Before dark when we were finishing with the evening appell and were due to be driven into the barrack, the Blockaltester called out one from our lines, a young man from Pruzany, a year or two older than myself by the name of Laizer K. He put him with his back to the rim of the hole that we dug for the water to run off a week or so earlier. With a loud voice the Blockaltester said; I will not kill you today. I will drag it out for several days. Having said this the Blockaltester delivered a blow to his face with such force that the young man was lifted up from the ground before falling into the hole. I have mentioned earlier that the two meter deep hole was half full with water and when the young man fell in, he totally submerged. When he stood up the Blockaltester ordered to get him out. There again he stood with his back to the hole dripping ice cold water from head to toe. The Blockaltester delivered another blow and when he got out, he hit him again.

After the third blow and dunking we were driven into the barrack. The next morning that young man went through the same three immersions and the same in the evening. We were beginning to admire the young man's fortitude. The same happened on the third day. That evening at the appell we could see his strength is at a low ebb and we began to wonder if he will survive another day. Not that death distressed us any more, by then we have seen enough of it. Our barrack was getting noticeably emptier, but those that have gone, perished through the often conducted selections by the camp doctors, died during the night from the beatings, from hunger, from

contracted diseases to which they were afraid to admit to for fear of being taken away to the gas chambers.

This case was different. Here a young man unable to resist incomprehensible hunger knowingly risked his life and stole two cubes of margarine from the Blockaltester who in turn stole it from us starving inmates, by giving us smaller pieces than was coming to us so that he could gorge himself with our food while we were expiring from hunger.

Of course our sympathy was on the side of that young man who took from the Blockaltester that which was rightly ours. We also admired his bravery which to be honest bordered on the irrational or even madness.

That night we noticed some activity in the Blockaltester's partitioned off corner. In the early morning when we were being driven out the barrack, we noticed that we have a new Blockaltester. After the appell we found out that the nights activities were a result of the sudden dismissal of our Blockaltester who was sent away on a transport, that is; to another camp.

The new Blockaltester knew nothing of the 'crime' committed by that young man Laizer and as a result his life was spared. This Laizer survived the camp and is today a successful businessman in Philadelphia.

Our new Blockaltester was a German with a green triangle which categorized him as a Berufsverbrecher B.V. (professional criminal).

Since I am mentioning triangles I will explain what those triangles represented; Every inmate in Auschwitz-Birkenau was obliged to have his or her number that they received upon arrival in Auschwitz marked on a piece of white material sewn on their jacket and pants. The piece of material was about twelve centimeters long and three centimeters wide. It was sewn on the jackets chest high and had in front of the number a painted triangle of two and a half centimeters in size. The colors of the triangles identified the reason for which the internee was arrested. The triangle pointed downwards with its base on top.

I will start with the most prevailing colors first; Red; "Schutzhaftling" preventive custody, political internee. Black; "Asoziale" (A.S.O.) (Asocial) none too precise a concept, prostitutes, gypsies, saboteurs, anything that could not be put a finger on (all incompassing). Green , point down ; "Berufsverbrecher" (B.V.) Professional criminal. Green, point up standing on its base "Sicherung-Verwahrte" (SV, PSV) preventive custody i.e. after serving sentence passed by court can be kept indefinately. Violet; "Internationale-Bibleforsher" (I.B.V.) Jehovah Witness. Purple; Priests and monks (catholic), Pink; Homosexuals. Letter "E" Erziehungs-Haftlinge"; Prisoners sent for reeducation, whose chances of getting out were very slim.

There were a few inmates that carried a circle five centimeters in diameters on a twelve centimeter square white background.
Black circle, meant "Straf-Kompanie" penal colony
Red circle; "Im Lager" liable to attempt escape or attempted. Those were not allowed outside the camp proper.

But by far the most visible and numerous triangles in Auschwitz-Birkenau and surrounding affiliated and subservient camps that numbered over forty, the so called "Ausen Lagern" (outside camps), were the so called Jewish triangles. Those, the Jewish triangles, actually consisted of two triangles. One the usual red political triangle and the second a yellow one, that was superimposed over the red one but pointing in the opposite direction. That is to say with the point up. Thus forming with it a two colored star of David. Those then stars of David, namely Jews, presented over seventy five percent of the inmates of Auschwitz and over ninety percent of the adjoining Birkenau.

All inmates of Auschwitz-Birkenau that had red triangles (political internees) had printed on their triangles a single letter that identified their county of origin. For example; Poles had a letter "P", Frenchmen an "F", Dutchmen a "H" and so on except for Germans and of course Jews. Apparently it made no difference to the Nazis the Jewish country of origin. We were all destined for the ovens.

Shortly after taking over the block and settling in, our new Blockaltester dismissed a couple Stuberdiensten and appointed new ones. Men from our block, that is our own from Pruzany. To be a Stubendienst meant the end of the constant nagging hunger, thirst, exposure to winter cold and protection from everything that could lead to a horrible and torturous death.

In return however, such a person in most cases had to renounce or sacrifice all human principles according which one has to conduct himself and live by.

One had to forget friends, neighbors acquaintances even family by turning against them, joining those who in order to save themselves or in order to prolong their life for a little while longer helped the SS in converting the camp into the hell which it was.

I do not know if those people found it difficult to overcome the change or were they to begin with creatures of such low character.

Maybe I am being too harsh on them with my judgment. Maybe they were to weak to endure the hunger and beating and gave in to temptation. How can one understand now what it was like at that time.

In any case we were happier with the couple new Stubendientsten from among us than the other non Jewish strangers that treated us with such cruelty.

Among the Stubendiensten in the three neighboring barracks that housed the other inmates from Pruzany were two Jews from France. One by the name of Freihight, the second by the name of Zulty. If they were any better then the other non Jewish Stubendiensten I do not know. But the fact that they were stubendiensten was enough to instill fear. Tall well fed, they always kept each other company and did not associate too much with the other non Jewish Stubendiensten.

Once finding myself near a neighboring barrack, I noticed the two of them sitting on a bench having a conversation. They were totally oblivious to us and spoke quite loudly. Even though many of them preferred to speak French, when it came to converse about everyday events, they spoke Polish or Yiddish. As I got close, I heard one say to the other; "Ale ten wladek ma wspanialy cios" (there now Wladek {Wladyslaw} knows how to deliver a magnificent blow/punch).

This remark was made regarding a Polish Blockaltester in one of our four blocks. After almost an entire month in Birkenau, I have heard and almost gotten used to many unpleasant, offending and repulsing words or statements. But that remark horrified and stunned me. I could not imagine how a Jew could admire a non Jewish Blockaltenstein for his talent in hurting and killing people. But before I had the time to fully digest what I just head, I heard the other one replying in a clear Polish accented Jewish; "You son of a bitch, he killed four hundred Jews during one night, is that what you are praising him for? Is that what you are glorifying him for"?

In that moment two facts were revealed to me. One that the Blockaltester from the nearby barrack was capable and did kill four hundred Jews in one night and second that one of the two Jewish Stubendiensten still had in him the decency and moral fairness to berate his equal for admiring that scoundrel and murderer.

I am mentioning this incident in order to give the reader an idea, a concept of the depth to which a human being can sink and the worthlessness of a human life in Auschwitz.

At the end of February the days became longer and somewhat warmer. No longer did we huddle to the barrack wall nor to each other. Instead we began to explore the layout of the accessable part of the camp. We began to pay more attention to the nearest, number three, crematorium which was constantly belching smoke daytime and sheets of fire at nigh. At times we

used to try and guess how many Jewish souls have been driven inside on a particular day. At other times how many during the month we have been there.

In our barrack the crowded bunks have long disappeared. Now there was room for everybody. The inmates fell victim to the often conducted selections, beatings, hunger and sickness that all led to the crematoriums.

We waited impatiently for the end of the six weeks which we were supposedly had to spend in quarantine, in order to weed out the sick and weak. In this respect the Nazis have succeeded very well. In fact better than expected. They have gotten rid of the weak and sick, but they also managed to make many healthy man sick in addition.

There was talk that in the camps where we will be working, the food will be more plentiful. Even the new block secretary confirmed this much. The new secretary from the French transport, the so called the forty two thousands, tall, handsome, cleanly dressed never raised his voice. Always polite despite the fact that he outranked everyone in the barrack except the Blockaltesten, did not fit in with the crude, vulgar and murderous bunch of overseers around him.

The days stretched like years. The constant beating, hunger, filth and lice that crawled leisurely over us, even over our jacket for all to see.

A few days before the end of February, as we were driven into the barrack for our lunch, or rather for the cup of soup, we were told to remain inside. We remained in the barrack for the rest of the day. It was only the next morning when we were driven out for the roll call, that we noticed some barracks across us are occupied. We were not permitted to get closer. Never the less during the day we found out that the new arrivals are gypsies.

The gypsies unlike us Jews did not go through any kind of selection. They just simply were taken from the train, entire families, men, women, children and baggage, led to the barracks and assigned a family per bunk.

This event became a daily occurrence for a while to the extent that we were permitted to remain outside and watch their arrival and assignment to the barracks. The two rows of barracks were being filled up fast with gypsies and it was then that this part of the camp became known as the "Gypsy Camp."

Blockaltesters (block leader) were sent in from the older part of the camp. Men with "experience", but the Stubendiensts were chosen from among themselves, the new arrived gypsies.

The first couple days they were confined to the barracks and were not even counted. They were left alone. Nobody raised a hand not even the

voice at them. They, have come from their homes with their possessions, bulging suitcases, money and food. The first few days they looked with contempt at the camp soup that used to be brought to them and refused to eat it.

We, barely existing on our starvation diet for a month, began slowly to get closer to the gypsy barracks hoping to benefit something, although we were chased and beaten by the Blockaltesters and our own Stubendiensten. Still the hunger used to overcome the fear. So I moved slowly towards a barrack. Suddenly the barrack door opened and out comes the Blockaltester. Before I could take one step backwards, he notices me, called me over and told me to stand at the big wide closed door, not to let anyone in nor out. Without another word, he walks away.

I know that by standing outside at the closed door , no manna will fall for me from heaven. Seeing the Blockaltester way back, a good distance and getting farther, I take a chance, open the door, slide in and close it behind me. I start out very slowly along one side of the bunks on which entire families sit with heaps of assorted luggage. About half way down, I notice sitting on a bunk among a pile of assorted suitcases and bags an old gyps woman. She looks at me dispassionately, but I can see in her tired eyes, wisdom and experience.

She winks at me and nods with her head. I stop and look at the old and wrinkled face which projects so much life experience and understanding. She pulls out from under an old blanket a red camp bowl half full with yesterday's congealed soup and says to me in German; I need the bowl.

My spoon is always at hand and I stick it unpretentiously in the congealed soup. The tasteless, cold and lumpy yesterday's soup barely slides down my throat. I wonder how clean it is after staying uncovered all night under her bunk. But the hunger conquers all. Still I remember thinking to myself: Look at you and see what you have turned into. Did you ever imagine to eat something like it in your life?

I am almost at my last spoonful when suddenly the door opens and in marches the Blockaltester. I gulp down what is in my mouth, put the spoon in my pocket and run towards him and the door behind him, as that door is my only escape and salvation.

His curses and the club fall on me simultaneously and follows me a good part of the road. When he finally lets me off and turns back to the barrack, I stop to wonder if it was really worth the beating I just received for the half bowl of yesterday's soup.

The gypsy transports keep on coming. They are assigned barracks. They have to carry their own baggage but get help as soon as they are in our part of the camp. Around the newcomers, there are always Blockaltesters, capos, Stubendiensts and other free loaders, all with the hope and intention to benefit from them. After all, they did not come into the camp like the Jews that had everything taken from them before entering the camp.

There were musicians among them who brought with them their instruments like violins, guitars, mandolins, and accordions. As the beginning of March got warmer, they formed a couple bands and used to give concerts in the middle of the afternoons. The men with long hair and clean shaven faces used to dress in their Sunday best and try to go for walks on the clayey road trying hard not to dirty their shoes. An impossible task. Some of the women tried to do the same in high heel shoes but gave up after a short attempt.

A couple more days go by and we notice that not only the camp bread becomes precious to them but the soup too. We start to wonder how long will it be before they will look like us.

In mid March, right after the roll call, when we usually used to be driven into the barrack for the night, we were ordered to remain standing outside. Shortly after we joined with all the others from the other three barracks. Now we were together from the four barracks. That is all the men form Pruzany selected to enter the camp. A total of just over twelve hundred men. We were lined up in a long line five in a row. A detachment of SS arrived and we are being counted. I look around at those in my barrack and realize that many of those that came with me are missing. Especially are noticeable the many Dutch Jews whom I did not know personally but were noticeably absent because of their language and height. Now there are hardly any to be seen.

We are being counted by the SS men over and over. There are barely eight hundred of us in total, from over the twelve hundred from Pruzany, some one hundred Dutch and two hundred from Bialystok that joined us as we entered this part of the camp. The so called gypsy camp, which indeed it became as soon as we left it that very evening.

Here I want to submit the exact number of men and women of ghetto Pruzany that entered the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in the four days of the evacuation, and their arrival in Auschwitz. Included are the first and the last running numbers tatooed on the arms of the men and women on each of those four days entering the camp.

Left Pruzany	Arr. Auschwitz	No. of Women	No. of Men	Rec. # from - to Women	Men
28-1-1943	30-1-1943	275	327	32604-32879	97825-98151
29-1-1943	31-1-1943	32	249	33325-33357	98516-98765
30-1-1943	1-11-1943	180	313	33358-33537	98778-99091
31-1-1943	2-11-1943	105	294	33928-34033	99211-99505

The above details are from the archives of the Polish State Museum in Auschwitz-Birkenau (Oswiecim-Brzezinka) which include the investigation files of the Gestapo activity in Eastern Prussia in which Pruzany was included at that time. There are also the files of the court records procedures, as well as the verdict of the court before whom the accused Gestapo men appeared.

The trial took place in the German town of Bielefel. The presiding judge was Judge Witte assisted by Judge Hoppe and Dr. Gaebert and a sworn in jury.

The accused Gestapo men were: Dr. Altenloch, Heimbach, Errelis and Dibus. The arrangers and supervisors of the transportation of Pruzany to Auschwitz were Kriminal Oberassistant Wilhelm and SS Rottenfurer Muth.

The verdict was announced on the 14-IV-1967.

The SS men counting us talk in a loud voice and we now know how many we are from all the four barracks taken together. The number is frightful. The mind does not want to accept it. Is it possible that we are only eight hundred men left from around fifteen hundred? We were twelve hundred from Pruzany, two hundred from Bialystok and a hundred Dutch Jews. Is it possible that a half of us perished in a period of six weeks without even working? What is the sense? What is the reasoning in keeping us for six weeks in quarantine during which time half of us died by beating, hunger and disease? While the other half is in such a state that it would not be able to put in a days work.

It all suddenly looked so senseless, so absurd, so ludicrous. We just stood there not knowing what to say or ask one another.

They finally got their numbers straight. We were surrounded by SS men with rifles at ready and ordered to march. We march through our part of the camp through the very same hole in the fence through which we marched in six weeks ago. We march on a dirt road. On either side barbed wire fences.

It seems we are between two camps. The one on the right looks abit older, then on the left which is brand new. It is a couple of hours since the sunset but the camp is so lit up that even a fly could not hide. We march along rail way tracks and I recognize the spot where we arrived and disembarked six weeks go. We pass by a long stone and brick building that is being built and which will later be known as the guard rooms. There is empty space afterwards on either side of the dirt road. After less than an hours walking, we find ourselves between what seems stables and suddenly as we come out from behind those buildings we see in front of us a tall well lit metal rod gate over which fastened to two metal rods in a semicircle in black metal letter a sign that reads: "Arbeit Macht Frei" (work makes you free).

We stop in front of the gate. I am in the first row and while we wait for the others to catch up, I look around. I see the camp is surrounded with a double barbed wire fence which is electrified. Around the outside barbed wire fence there is a solid cement wall of two and a half meters high. I realize that the solid cement wall was not built to stop escapees, for it is humanly impossible to get through the two electrified fences plus the SS men on the guard towers all around. I come to the conclusion that the solid fence is to stop others from looking in.

I look up again at the sign that says "Arbeit Macht Frei" and think to myself: What mockery! In the last six weeks in Birkenau I got acquainted only too well with the Nazi promises, with their respect for and value of human life. Aren't they ashamed, even for their own men, to put up such a glaringly flagrant and deceiving sign?

Through the gate I see large buildings looming inside. They appear even bigger behind the lamp shades that aluminate the camp. I look at the difference between this camp and the one we left behind an hour ago and wonder what does this one hold for us.

From the nearby guard house appear several SS men. Two of them open the wide gate and we begin to march in while being counted carefully. We are being led between rows of two story brick buildings to the very last of one row next to the fence. As soon as we enter the building I can smell the unmistakable odour of disinfectant which reminds me of a shower for which I have been longing so much. The filth on our lice ridden skin is a centimeter thick.

In groups of two hundred we are being shaven completely, disinfected and showered. We receive a set of underwear, a pair of pants and jacket, a cap in the shape of a beret and a coat. True the coat is made of the same material as

the camp uniform, that is the striped pajama like style and has no lining nor does it give any warmth but still it carries the name coat.

By the time we all went through the entire process it was daylight. We were driven outside and watched as the work groups are being formed to go to work. As soon as they left we were taken to the appell platz (the roll call square) which was in front of the kitchen. There we were divided in specialized work groups. This was done by the overseers under the supervision of the SS. There were a lot of tradesmen or artisans among us that were needed for the rapidly growing camp and the industry that was being developed in the vicinity. During the process of assigning work the SS did not miss an opportunity to have their bit of fun with us. One of them announced that they need typists. There were a few typists among us, but many figured that they can assure themselves with an easy job and claimed to be typists. After the SS had their share of fun with them and a good deal of mockery they sent them all to work at unloading trainloads of bricks, stones and sand which turned out to be one of the worst places to work.

When they called for locksmiths, I stepped forward. In all we were a group of some twenty men. We were taken to block 18 which was opposite the kitchen.

I will take a moment to describe the layout of the block. Unlike Birkenau, where the buildings were referred to as barracks, which they were, in Auschwitz I, the buildings were referred to as blocks. Those were two story brick buildings divided into two separate entities. The first floor and basement was under one Blockaltesters jurisdiction and in our case that was block number eighteen. The second floor and attic was run by another Blockaltester and his own Stubendiensten and was called 18"A". Block eighteen and block eighteen "A" were two separate entities, completely independent of each other, not interfering in each others business, even though under the same roof. In fact even the entrances were separate. While block eighteen used the front entrance, block eighteen "A" used the side one.

We are being led through the front door into a long hallway at which end is another door leading to the outside. The floor of the hallway is clean and we notice several doors leading off the hallway. We are led to a door with a number four over it. We are welcomed by a man of about thirty, of medium height, who would be referred as stout in normal times. Such a terminology did not exist in Auschwitz. It would have to be invented. His triangle is red with the letter "P" for Polish. He looks us over pretends that he is pleased with the fact that we are Polish Jews, it will be easier to communicate. Asks where we are from and when we tell him we can see the blank look in his

eyes. While this almost cordial conversation goes on, he mentions that he is the Stubendienst in this Stube (room). The door suddenly opens and in comes the Blockaltester, the one that brought us into this room and during our conversation with the Stubendienst disappeared. He holds four or five loaves of bread and explains to us that this bread does not represent our daily ration which we will get tonight. This is a personal present from him to us. He stands and watches as the Stubendienst cuts it up and divides it among us. We exchange glances and I wonder if we are not dreaming, thinking about the reception we received in Birkenau six weeks ago.

The Stubendienst assigns us bunks. I am assigned bunk number sixty four. Here I have a chance to look around the Stube (room) which is one of the four on this the main floor. It is fully separated from the others with a solid stone wall. The two doors leading into the room are on either end of the room leading to the long hallway which is in turn connects to the other three rooms on the floor. There is also a door which opens into the public toilet, another to the wash room yet another to the room of the Blockalesten.

As one enters our stube (room) there are three tier bunks on either side. In front of you is an empty space of two by four meters taken up by a table. A space of almost a meter wide runs the length of the room to the other end where there is the same size space and table. This connecting passage is the main passage of the room. The rest of the room is taken up with three tier bunks, except for a couple very narrow pass way, just wide enough for the emaciated bodies to squeeze through in order to get to their bunk. The bunks are individual, about sixty centimeters wide. They are fenced in with low boards so one should not roll off. On each bunk there is a straw sack and two blankets, one to sleep on the other to cover with.

The Stubendienst tells us to take of our shirts turn them inside out and look for lice. We are sure that we have no lice, only a few hours ago we were shaven from top of the head to the toes, disinfected and well scrubbed under a hot shower. How can we have lice? The Stubendienst insists and we obey. Lo and Behold!! We find lice in our undershirts. Where do they come from? The answer comes from the Stubendienst himself. You can not rid yourselves of lice with one disinfection and a shower. They bite into the skin and lay eggs. We continue our hunt for lice and squash them between our thumb nails.

At noon we receive a red enamel bowl and line up for our soup. We do receive a full litre of soup, even though it is three times as much as in Birkenau, it does not satisfy our hunger.

The afternoon we spend with the Stubendienst who acquaints us with the regulations of the stube (room), the block and camp. How to make the bed, it should be straight as an arrow. Where the toilets are with the individual enamel seats. The washroom with several long troughs over which there is a constant flow of water day and night. The walls of the washroom, troughs and floor are all tiled. One is not allowed to enter the washroom with his shirt on. The punishment is severe for no obedience.

The longer he speaks the more threatening his voice becomes and his attitude almost fatherly this morning, is slowly being replaced by that characteristic Birkenau air.

Without exchanging a word between ourselves, we begin to understand that it would be advisable not to underestimate his unfinished sentences which ended mostly with "if not".

Shortly after six the working groups so called "commandos" began to return from work. Our Stubendienst whose name was "Kazik" (Kazmir) led us outside and put us in the line with the others from our block who have just returned from work.

The Blockaltester knows that his new twenty arrivals which are called in camp language "Zugang" are unfamiliar with the appell (roll call) procedure. We, the entire six hundred men in our block line up ten deep to facilliate the counting. The method of counting is such, as we are lined up in straight lines like soldiers an SS man comes over to do the counting. The Blockaltester yells "Achtung" (attention). We pull in the empty stomachs and puff out our bony chests. Again we hear him yell "Mutzen" (hats), and everybody like a perfectly synchronized machine grabs with his right hand his cap "Ab" (off). Every hand pulls the cap off the head and brings it down with a loud slap to his thigh. The SS man walks slowly by the front row, making sure there are nine more behind the one in front, counts the front row, gives a nod to the Blockaltester and walks to the center of the appell platz (place) to report his findings to the "Rapportfierer." We hear again "Mutzen" (hats) we bring our hats to our heads "Auf" (on) and leaving the caps as they land on our heads, we bring our hands down to our thighs with a loud slap. If one is late a split second, it is heard immediately and the culpable get a good thrashing from the Stubendiensten.

After a few dozen tries and many blows we respond to the command like old pros. From where we are I can see the assembled in front of block seventeen, sixteen, fifteen and fourteen. They are all going through the same exercise.

The SS man that counted us goes to the center of the Appell Platz where from nowhere appeared a small portable stand. An SS officer stands nearby with a book in hand. The SS man comes over, salutes and reports the number of prisoners he just counted in his assigned block. The officer marked the numbers down,. Added them up and by the time this was done the Lagercommendant showed up. As he was approaching that portable stand we could hear the command "Mitzen Ab" and this time the entire camp did it simultaneously. The officer who did the total adding and who was addressed according to his function as "Rapportfierer" not according to his rank quickly marched over to the camp commandant, saluted and reported to him the number of prisoners. As soon as this was over we heard the command "Mitzen auf" (hats on) and dismissed.

For the record I will add that the name of that SS officer the "Rapportfierer" of Auschwitz was Oswald Kaduk. He was one of the top functionaries in the Auschwitz death factory. He succeeded to avoid justice for forty years and when finally caught and brought before the court , he was one of the very few Nazis that refused to express regret for his part in the Holocaust, nor his actions in Auschwitz. I can still remember how we used to try to stay out of his sight, never mind his reach when he used to walk into the camp. And to think that this man was accountable only to the camp commandant Rudolf Hoss, under whose command one and three quarter million human beings were put to death Among them a million and a half Jews.

As soon as we were dismissed after the Appell some of us went back to the Stube (room). Others began to look around the nearby blocks for others from Pruzany. We did not remain long outside as eight thirty we had to be back in the stube. If we expected something to eat that evening it was in vain. All we got is a few mouthfuls of the bitter water which was called Tea in camp.

At exactly eight thirty the sound of a gong was heard all over camp. Our Stubendienst Kazik yelled in a loud voice: Stubensperre (room curfew). Nobody is allowed outside the room except to the wash room which was across the hallway almost opposite our room. We hear his voice a gain: "Louse appell". (lice roll call). Everyone takes off his shirt, turns it inside out and starts looking for lice.

My bunk is the middle one. On the bottom one I see sits a man in his mid thirties, is number is four, two, zero, zero,zero. Exactly forty two thousand. By his number I can tell that he is from France. He is of medium height, broad shouldered and not at all emaciated. I add quickly: He is from the

French transport who a couple compatriots we already met in Birkenau and he is not hungry. Who is he? Still he has a friendly face and not at all hostile. I say to him a few words and he is curious to start a conversation. He turns out to be a very nice man. He is trying to help with the only thing he has; Camp experience. As we talk a tall man of over six feet comes over according to his red triangle, I can tell that he is a political internee and the letter "P" tells me that he is a Pole. The French Jew whose name is Fish welcomes him with a polite "Good evening Mr. Leon". The other just as politely answers "Good evening." Adding; I see we have a new neighbor. With those words he puts one foot on the side board of the bottom bunk, grabs with a hand the side board of the third bunk, puts his other foot on my the second bunk and propels himself onto the third bunk.

Not having slept the previous night and knowing that there is a straw sack with a blanket over it waiting for me, besides one to get covered with and despite the hunger, I could not wait to lie down.

Another gong and I hear the Stubendienst voice :"Liths-out" and everything is suddenly concealed in darkness. A bit of light enters through the two little windows in the doors. They come from the washroom across the hall that are always lit.

It seems I just shut my eyes when I hear the gong and right after it the light in the room comes on and the thundering voice of the Stubendienst "Aufstein" (get up). He told us yesterday that we do get up at four thirty. Is it already four thirty? Has the night already gone?

Everyone jumps off the bunk, pulls on his pants and pulls off the shirt. We have forgotten that one gets washed in the morning, but you are not allowed in with your shirt on. The water runs constantly and can not be stopped. I stick my hands under the rapidly flowing water and my fingers get numb from cold. I splash some water over my face and neck and realize that I have nothing to dry myself with. All other inmates have some sort of towel but the newly arrived have none. We use our shirts to dry ourselves. We get dressed and line up near the table in the back part of the room where the Stubendienst is handing out to each one a quarter of a loaf of bread and a tiny piece of sausage.

At the other table in the so called front part of the room I see sitting the so called "Prominent" inmates. They are a capo and about half a dozen of his assistants the so called "Vorarbeiter" (foremen). I recognize among them the Pole that I met yesterday, the one that sleeps on the third bunk over me. They are being served by a Pole of about twenty five by the name of Zygmund W. who slices for them bread not from the quarters but from a whole bread, and

spreads over it margarine and covers it with slices of sausage. They sit calmly, eat slowly until they are full, and wash it down with the same tea that we get but they sweenten it.

How and where from do they get whole loaves of bread or cubes of margarine I have not the slightest idea. The slices of sausage that are covering the margarine on their bread is thicker than the slices we get. I know not to ask and stay patiently in line for my piece of bread and the tiny piece of sausage. I get my piece of bread and it seems to me that the man before me got a bigger piece. I get upset, fate short-changed me this morning. I glance once more at the piece of bread in that other mans hand and I am not so sure if his quarter bread is any bigger than mine. I get the piece of sausage which is less than a centimeter thick and am being driven outside where we are being lined up for the appell, like yesterday.

We practice several times with our caps the "on off" exercise and hear the Blockaltester announc that the new arrivals of yesterday shall line up with the D.A.W. group after the appell is over. As soon as the apell is over we hear all over the camp the command "Commando Eintreten" (Fall into work groups). Everyone is running to his "Commando" (group) where he works. Our commando by the name of D.A.W. (German repair shops) is the largest in the camp, numbering twelve hundred men. We are divided up in groups of hundreds, five men abreast, twenty rows to the hundred. In charge of each hundred is a capo who appointss ten men of his hundred to be in charge of each ten. The ones in charge of the ten marks down their numbers and passes it on to the capo. I can hear an orchestra playing and see groups of prisoners marching towards the gate. It is not day yet but everything around is well lit up. We are not being delayed on the way to work and are one of the first to leave the camp. After all, we are twelve hundred men and very important for the German war industry as well as for the extention of the camp proper. I see the first hundreds already marching ahead and in military fashion and I still myself do the same. We are marching, to my left I am leaving behind the camp kitchen with its tall chimneys. Past the kitchen there is a green lawn with rows of chairs on which sit a couple dozen musicians in their freshly cleaned and pressed striped camp uniforms. The conductor on a pedestal conducts the orchestra very professionally. We turn left towards the gate, trying hard to march to the beat of the march they are playing. I try hard to be abreast with the other four in my line. At the gate stand several SS men of different ranks. They count very precisely but do not interfere in our march. Out of the gate and I feel better. I can turn my head even look around. The ones around me are all from my block. Most of

them Poles. They see in me immediately a new comer and ask where I am from. Receiving the answer that I am from Poliesie, their curiousity satisfied, they do not ask anything more. I think to myself; one country and I couldn't be more than five hundred kilometer from them, yet they do not even know what to ask, as if we are not only from one country but not even one world.

Is it then surprising that during the Polish era the majority of the Christian population in our parts of the country considered the Poles strangers and the feeling was mutual, that even now the Poles do not want to know and do not care what is happening in those eastern parts of the former Poland.

We go on for about a kilometer and turn into a yard of a large factory. I see a large four story brick building painted over white and across five large wooden barracks in style of the Birkenau barrack but much wider and very much longer.

I hear again the command "Commando Eintreten" (work groups fall in). Everybody runs to his assigned place except us the twenty men locksmiths from our "Stube" (room) and some fifty carpenters that were assigned to block eighteen "B" which takes up the second floor and attic in our block 18.

We are approached by a few capos and foremen or Vorarbeiter. They read out everyones number, they know already everyones trade and where to take him. We are broken up in smaller groups, the carpenters in small groups are being led to the two large barracks and into the four story brick building. The large barracks are being called halls. The locksmiths are divided into two groups and taken into the third and fourth hall. I am directed into the third hall. Entering I noticed rows of partly or completely dismantled ammunition wagons around which prisoners are working. As I pass by I notice that the wagons without exception are to a certain degree damaged. Some beyond repair. Along the walls of that large barrack are work benches near which more inmates are working.

The capo, a short broad shouldered man with a thin twisted face of a criminal and a green triangle to go with it offers me a skeptical glance, fastens a piece of metal in the vise and handing me a file says "File."

I took the file in my hand not understanding precisely the sense of the test. Just because I know how to file does not mean to me that I am a lock smith. At school in Brest-Litowsk I have made more complicated work than this and I still did not consider myself to be a tradesman.

The moment I apply the file to the metal, I can tell that the metal has too much give and in order to file it properly, it has to sit deeper in the vice, but I

do not dare do it. After all the capo put it this way and who am I to correct it. So I start to file

The capo looks at my filing approvingly, then asks me why I did not lower the piece of metal deeper into the vise. I tell him that he put it there and told me to file. Without a word, he and his foreman turned away and march off towards another of us new arrivals to put through the test. One of his foremen take me to a work bench around which some eight or ten men are working. Turning to one of them, apparently one in charge of the group he says; here is your new man and walks away. The nearby workers look at me first inquisitively and I return the same look. We are looking at each others triangles and I do not see a single Jewish star. What I see is dissatisfaction and outright hostility in their faces. They turn around as if I was not there and go back to work.

My immediate boss shows me where to find the needed tools. He points at a demolished ammunition wagon and says; Start taking it apart.

Our work consists of dismantling the damaged ammunition wagons. They are entirely made of metal and most of the joints are welded together. Still there is a large amount of nuts and bolts that give strength to their construction. Partly due to the damage and partly to the design it is difficult to get to the many screws. In order to get to them, one is forced to crawl in the narrow and tight compartments of the wagons and their damaged state complicates it even more.

With me at our work bench are a couple Poles, three or four Czechs and as many Russians. The Czechs are older men, some in the thirties, the others in early and mid twenties. The Czechs and Poles wear red triangles (political), the Russians black. The work is strenuous but nobody stays over you with a stick.

Exactly at twelve we hear a loud whistle. Everybody drops his tools wherever he stand and runs outside. In the middle of the factory yard are being formed five long single lines of prisoners supervised by capos where at the head stood the "Ubber kapo" (head kapo.) With their yelling and at times with a stick they keep our lines in order. I notice that every inmate has a red bowl, except the newcomers. It does not take long and we too get those standard camp bowls and wait patiently for our soup.

Among the kapos I notice a large man and as for Auschwitz a very old one. I estimate him to be between fifty and sixty. He walks along the rows of prisoners without a stick or a sound. I come to the conclusion that he must already have such a reputation that he has no need for a stick or yell. He

turns around and I notice the Jewish star or rather the two triangles, the red and yellow superimposed over each other.

A few days later I found out that this man is originally from Berlin by the name of Rosen. By profession an engineer who before the war designed and manufactured all the machinery that was now in this plant and who keeps the entire plant running as he was the only person who knew their complexity and was able to direct the repairs when they broke down. For this purpose he had a couple dozen mechanics to his disposition and was appointed kapo over them. I also found out that this man never raised his voice to anybody and certainly not a stick. That every morning he use to gather a "Minyan" (ten men needed) to conduct religious services, for what if caught he would have most likely paid with his life.

I get my liter soup and relish every spoonful. Before I know the liter soup is gone and I scrape the empty bowl with my spoon until it is as clean as if I washed it. I think to myself how nice it would be to have another liter.

Everyone hides his empty bowl around the work bench and I do the same. The spoon remains in my pocket never to be parted with. Who knows when an occasion might arise when I will need it.

At six o'clock the whistle blows. The workers tidy up in a hurry. The foreman makes sure the tools are back in place and everybody runs outside to fall in the respective hundred in which he came to work too.We are being counted by the capos and start the march back to camp.

As we pass the camp gate we are again closely counted. We march on. To the right plays the orchestra and to the left the block twenty four seems to be unoccupied. We reach the end of that block and turn right passing by the kitchen and we are in front of our block eighteen. Again we line up in lines ten deep. A few minutes later we stand again like well trained soldiers being counted by a couple of SS men. We go through the same procedure as in the morning with the hats on and off. Shortly after we are dismissed.

I can now move around freely, but where do I go or what do I do when the hunger muffles all feeling and occupies all thoughts. I am unable to think about anything else but food and start wandering among the blocks, maybe something will come my way. But nothing does. The buildings are made of brick, the ground a solid asphalt and the inmates... a human diversity of suffering beyond imagination. Yes I see some well fed prisoners. These are the priviliged ones and the prominent ones in the camp. They are the "Blockalteste" (Block elder), capos, Stubendiensten (Room elders), Block Schreiber, (Block registrar), and others without rank that were given good positions. They are all well dressed in clean and freshly pressed uniforms.

They walk erect, almost with a military gait and noticeable aloofness. Most of them wear their green triangles as if it was a badge of honor, having completely forgotten that it identifies them as professional criminals never to be released.

There are others among that elite besides the German criminals. Some are Polish inmates, mostly with red triangles, political prisoners, many belonging to the Polish intelligentsia. Some of them managed to get themselves comfortable jobs, or I would rather say positions.

But by far the overwhelming majority consisted of emaciated, hungry, starving, walking skeletons. The so called in camp slang "Muselmanner" (Moslems) that consisted almost entirely of Jews, except for some Russians and gypsies, which were barely noticeable among the multitude of the Jewish walking skeletons. Their deep sitting eyes, the sunken almost transparent cheeks, the protruding jaws, the dry lips that could not shut over teeth expressed so much suffering and hunger that for a moment I felt to be more fortunate than they. A question came to my mind and I asked myself; How long will it be before I will look like them?

Depressed and in shock, I returned to my stube where I took off my shirt. Turning it inside out, I began to look for lice.

Compared to the bunks in Birkenau, the bunks in Auschwitz were comfortable. At nine o'clock the lights went out and everybody lied down to sleep. The hunger however was so intense that I could not shut my eyes. I start thinking of the food I ate at home before the war. About the food that I did not like and refused to eat, or that I left on my plate to be thrown out. I think of home, my dead parents, sisters and brother, grandparents and reprimand and scold myself for becoming so unfeeling, so morally degraded that instead of grieving and mourning the loss of my family, I think of food.

Yet the exhaustion of the day that started at four thirty in the morning, the twelve hours long work day and the constant nagging hunger took its toll and I fell asleep.

The days became a routine. To my surprise, a couple days later right after returning from work and after the appell (roll call), we line up block after block on the appelle platz in front of the kitchen where each of us inmates receives half a loaf of bread and a slice of sausage. I found out that this extra half a loaf and the slice of sausage which is called in camp "Tzulage" (additional) is a twice a week occurrence. I eat up the half loaf of bread and the piece of sausage and am surprised to find out that I am still hungry.

The few days go by working and continuous thinking about food. Sunday we sleep in an extra half an hour and get up at five. After the appell,

we receive the regular quarter bread and a small piece of cheese that smells terrible. I hold the piece of cheese for no more than two minutes before it is gone and during the day wash my hands several times. Yet I can smell it on my hands the next day.

The Stubendienst (room elder) orders everyone to shave. Not only the faces but the heads too. There is in our stube (room) a professional barber. A Jewish man from France and is referred to as the Block Barber. There are also a hundred men in our stube, an impossible job for one man. He shaves only the big shot prisoners like the Stubendienst and his assistant, the capo, and the half dozen foremen. To shave us ordinary inmates, he picks three men from among us to do the job. In return the three men will receive a liter soup extra at noon when the soup will be distributed in the stube. The tree chosen are not barbers and are as handy with a razor as I. As a result, when the job was done there were quite a few walking around with cuts to their faces or heads as if after a brawl.

I down my liter soup in seconds and my stomach feels as empty as before. I look with envy at those who are still eating theirs and are savoring every spoonful. I am mad at myself for having eaten so fast and having to look now at the others still eating. A couple of us are ordered to collect the bowls, take them to the washroom and wash them. It is one o'clock Sunday afternoon, when the Stubendienst yells "Bet rue" (bed rest) and all have to lie down for two hours. "The accursed Nazis" I think to myself. On one hand they are killing here thousands of innocent people daily, make us work until we fall dead and on the other hand, the hypocrisy of giving us two hours bed rest every Sunday afternoon for which we will repay them by working twice as hard tomorrow.

After the two hours rest, the prisoners are told to write letters home, except of course the Jews who have nobody to write to and the Russians. I presume for security reasons.

The first Sunday was unfortunately the last quiet Sunday for us Jews for a long time. The following Sunday right after the appell, the capos started the rounding up of "volunteer" workers to unload building material from rail cars. The material consisted of bricks, stones, sand, cement, planks entire logs and alike. The supervisors were a mixed lot from all blocks that consisted of capos, foremen and their cronies that were eager to please the many SS men around by beating the emaciated bodies of the starving inmates. An action that used to delight the SS man who used to roll in laughter and delight.

Of course I was taken too and came back to the camp at noon for our liter of soup. After the six hours of such work returning to the stube beaten, bleeding, barely dragging the feet, we got our liter of soup. The remaining hours of the Sunday, we spent licking our wounds and cuts.

The hunger became a constant companion which did not leave me for a moment and all my plans to satisfy it remained a dream.

The halley or oversized barrack in which we worked were heated by tin ovens. They were larger than regular petrol barrels that stood upright. Its top was cut away and lowered inside half way down the barrel in which inch size holes were drilled. The top was replaced with a flat piece of tin. In the lower part of the barrel were few holes for creating a draft. The upper part of the barrel was filled with sawdust set on fire and covered with the piece of tin. An attached tin flue (chimney)led to an opening in the ceiling.

Several days later I noticed that the Russian inmates working with me are stringing potatoes on a piece of wire and lowering them into the fire to bake, bending the upper end of the wire on the rim of the stove. To my question as to where they got the potatoes I got no answer. As the hunger drove me to despair and my mind was constantly occupied with thoughts of food, I began to approach the pile of garbage that used to lie in front of the kitchen every morning that the kitchen night shift used to throw out. It consisted of rotten vegetables and potatoes that even the SS men saw it unfit for the prisoners.

One morning before lining up for work, I went over and started to rummage in that garbage heap. From nowhere, appeared someone with a stick and drove me away.

It occurred to me to get up before the gong, that is before four thirty in the morning to run across to the heap of garbage. This entailed risking my life for it was forbidden to leave the block before the gong at four thirty. Never the less I got dressed in the dark stube (room) lying on my bunk in order not to arise suspicion, I sneaked out of the room into the long corridor and through the main door outside to the pile of garbage. There I filled my pant's pockets with the rotten oozing potatoes. Entering the block, I did not dare to enter the stube as it was close to sounding of the gong and I might be noticed. I went into the toilet and spent the next few minutes in fear somebody should not find me there. As soon as the gong sounded, the entire block came to life and became a beehive. In that tumalt, I entered the room, quickly taking off the jacket and shirt I went to the washroom where I became one of the crowd.

The rotten potatoes consisting of an oozing mass, kept filtering through my pant's pockets like through a strainer. Oozing, dripping down my legs and

my pant on my shoes. Once at work, I used to string them on a piece of wire and bake them in the oven. While the Russians used to put in good potatoes they used to come out nicely baked, mine that were rotten to begin with, came out pieces of an undistinguishable burned substance.

I knew that those burned pieces of rotten potatoes have no nourishing value, just the opposite. I can get sick from it, but for the moment something went down my stomach that made me feel as if I have eaten something.

One morning, after I have worked there for about two weeks, our capo passes by and notices the pieces of wire hanging out from under the tin plate covering the stove. Lifting the cover, he saw the strings of potatoes. His face turns angrier than usual and with his harsh voice he thundered; Whose is it? I am astonished seeing the four Russians, whose potatoes they really were, pointing their fingers at me. I was hurt and offended knowing that the young Russians hail from deep Russian where fellowship is a virtue and anti semitism is officially strictly prohibited. Since I have been working with them I succeeded in establishing a rapport of sorts with them, speaking their language and as of late being a former Soviet citizen as they. It appeared to me that they have accepted me as one of their own.

Without a word the capo handed me over to one of his vorarbeiter (foremen) who tells me to follow him. We go out our "Halley" number three pass by halley number two and one and we find ourselves at the edge of a huge lumber yard which I will refer to in its German name "Holtz Platz". He leads me through rows of stocked up piles of timbers and planks of assorted lengths, thickness and width. He leads me to a group of working inmates. The unavoidable foreman comes over and my escort says to him: "Here is one more for you" and then turns around and leaves.

My new supervisor barely offers me a glance and gives a bark pointing with his long stick at the nearby group. "Go to them." I go over to the group and see before me a couple dozen young Jews like myself confused, bewildered, battered, emaciated bodies with protruding bones wrapped in a grayish colorless skin. They are bending over and straining to lift boards that are thicker than themselves and loading them on a wagon. I suddenly feel a terrible pain in my back and immediately realize that it was the foreman that delivered the blow with his stick. His words thunder: Did you come to observe? I run at once and start lifting a board. It is much heavier than I thought Lying outdoors for moths it absorbed a lot of water. Now it weighed much more than it should have. I strain myself and lift one side. Someone else at the other end does the same and we throw the heavy board into the wagon. We are working with all our strength but the foreman goes

around and hits continuously. I would have liked to ask him why but I don't dare.

I see others working with their last gasp and he is even harder on them. What kind of a creature are you? I think to myself. Do you require of us work or do you do it for no particular reason. It turns out that the answer to both questions is yes.

The wagon is full with thick and heavy boards. We harness ourselves onto the wagon, others take up positions around the wagon and with encouragemet of the foreman's stick, the wagon begins to move slowly forward. The wagon is so heavy and I can see the others straining with their last ounce of strength and the stick keeps on falling.

We reach a piece of road where the ground is a bit firmer and the wagon moves easier. The foreman disappears for a moment and is back with a long stick. He shoves the stick in between the spikes of the front wheels and the wagon comes to a stop. The foreman in an uncontrollable rage starts hitting blindly and indiscriminately over heads, shoulders and backs. He stops in front of a young man now a caricature of a former young man and starts hitting him mercilessly. I see that the young man is trying hard to stay on his feet and I wonder why, maybe if he would fall down the foreman would leave him alone.

The heavy blows are too much for that exhausted soul to withstand and he falls down. The foreman delivers a few more blows to his head to immobilize him. With his boot he delivers a few kicks to turn him around, face up. We watch in horror as the foreman puts his stick across the poor young man's throat, steps with one foot on one end of the stick and brings the other foot on the other end. The skinny neck does not resist the weight of the well fed foreman, the German criminal with the green triangle who is actually a "Silesian" who spoke German and Polish but considered himself German. We look with sympathy and fear as his tortured soul expires before our eyes.

The foreman knows only too well when one is dead. He picks up his stick and without missing a beat starts swinging it at us. He pulls out the long stick from between the wheels spikes and the wagon moves again.

We stop in front of another group of workers. Their foreman, a tall man with his left arm completely missing. He has a red triangle with the letter "P' (Pole). In front of him is a little stand on which there are some papers. The man under his command are measuring and stacking up the planks and timber according to size while he, the foreman, writes them down. I look at those workers with envy and feel sorry for myself. We unload the wagon and

go for another load. Again the pummeling, the beating, the back breaking under the heavy timber and I wonder how long can I survive in here.

The mid day whistle comes as if the Messiah. On the way to lining up, I notice a red camp bowl stuck among the timber pile. I pick it up and go to line up for the soup.

During the midday break, I strike up a conversation with my co workers a sorry lot of beaten, broken young Jews. They tell me that the group I work with is called commando "Holtz-Platz" (lumber yard) and it is a straff-kommando (penal company) that here are being sent all those that commit any transgression in this factory. The group consists of some fifty to sixty men. It depends on the mortality rate which is on the average ten percent per day. The foreman's name, whose acquaintance I had the misfortune to make that morning, was Pilarek. That Pilarek has an assistant, a Polish prisoner who is not much better than himself. There is a capo, a German prisoner with a green triangle (professional criminal) who leaves it up to Pilarek to do the grizzly work and there is of course a schreiber. (registrar).

After the break the same hell. I think to myself: What crime have I committed that I should deserve such an end and Pilarek keeps on hitting. We carry boards. They are thick and heavy and we carry two at a time One is unable to put them on his shoulder so somebody lifts up one end and you put you shoulder under it, a second man carried the other end.

We carry them in a long line with Pilarek at our side hitting constantly. He concentrates in particular on the legs between the knee and the ankle. We can hear as the stick lands on the bony legs of the unfortunate who under the heavy weight of the boards and the fear of dropping them, can not even make the attempts to avoid them.

Pilarek finds his victims, an unfortunate young boy falls with the boards. He does not get a chance to get up. Pilarek's heavy sticks keep on falling over him without a stop. At the beginning the boy coves himself with his hands and arms but soon he can not move them fast enough. Then they cease moving and the boy lies helpless under Pilarek's blows. With a few more blows of Pilarek's heavy stick, the boy lies motionless and Pilarek is placing his stick across his throat.. .

I look with horror at the macabe scene and see myself under his stick. I feel grief for not leaving the ghetto together with my family. I could have spent with them two more days in the train and gone together into the gas chamber. What for did I have to suffer the past two months? The hunger, the cold, the beating, the anguish, the agony, the pain, what for…?

With such disheartening and dark thoughts past my first day on the "Holtz-Platz." At six o'clock the whistle blows and we run to line up in our hundred. A capo supervises to make sure we are five in a row, twenty rows to the hundred. The hundred is divided in ten groups, two rows to a group, one of the ten is appointed and in charge of every ten. He has the numbers of the ten under his charge and makes sure they are all present.

The man in charge of our ten is a Pole of about thirty five and unlike the others in my group, who are all Poles and seem to have good and assured positions in D.A.W., he behaves himself humbly and speaks to me, the only Jew, decently. The others ignore me as if I was not there, which suits me fine.

What happened to the killed ones I do not know until I turn around and see at the end of the last hundred a covered wagon is being pulled by prisoners and until then, I did not know what is in it.

After the appell, when I sit on my bunk and take off the soggy shoes which I received coming to Auschwitz from Birkenau, I notice that my feet are swollen and I wonder what they will look like tomorrow after work if I will survive the day. I am totally exhausted and morally broken. I stretch out on my bunk asking G-D why do I deserve it. With dark thoughts on my mind, I fall asleep.

When I am awakened by the gong, I ask G-D why he has not taken me to him. Why he is exposing me to another day like yesterday. How well it would have been to fall asleep and not to get up.

I am again in my formation of hundred and the entire commando of twelve hundred with me from D.A.W. starts out. Again after getting to the factory, we hear the command; Commando Eintreten, everyone runs to his group. Yesterday morning I was running to fall in with Halley number three, but now I have to go to the Penal Commando (column). I feel that today is my last day on earth, but what is worse is the way I have to part with the world. The murderous beating and the being throttled by the murderer Pilarek.

We fall in. The schreiber (registrar) checks all the numbers. A few are missing and we all know that their tortured souls expired over night in the block.

The group that measures and stacks the planks is separated from us and led away by their one armed Pole. We, the remaining, are being divided into two groups. One under the supervision of Pilarek, the other under the supervision of his Polish assistant.

The work is the same and the Polish foreman yells and hits too, but not as much as Pilarek. He hits and beats if we do not move fast enough or if one

tries to pick up a lighter plank or log instead of the closes one to him. We strain with all the strength we have left, but at least the Polish foreman does not stop the wagon wheels from turning. The two Poles that joined us yesterday for whatever sin they committed are not with us today. I ask my co workers how come? They were in better shape than we. I am told that Poles or even Russians do not remain to work on the Holtz Platz, they are being taken into other places to work. It is only Jews when brought here to this commando are condemned to remain here and to end their short life in suffering.

Even though the beating under the Polish assistant was less than under Pilarek, the work was not. With a sigh of relief we welcomed the noon whistle. I find the red bowl that I hid yesterday, stay in line and get my soup. I eat fast for I was told that the capo took some men to "Canada". (a name given to the group that worked at sorting the belongings of Jews brought to Auschwitz). The prisoners working in "Canada" often left their soup and our capo arranged to bring it and distribute it among us.

It was not for our benefit that he made this arrangement. He used it as a pretext to enter that fenced off place for his own benefit.

As our capo was escorting the sup carriers out of that fenced up and guarded place, he succeeded to become friends with the capo of the group working inside and I am sure befriended a few SS men who used to search the soup carriers on their way out, even put a stick into the soup containers mixing it around to make sure there is nothing in it, except the soup. Still my capo, a German with a green triangle (professional criminal), knew how to fool the SS men too and succeeded during those trips to smuggle out a fortune.

Thus it was that right after I finished my soup, we, the workers of the timber yard lined up among the piles of timber and received a bit additional soup. This time I ate slowly and savored every spoonful. I barely swallowed half a dozen spoonfuls when we hear the whistle that signals the end of the mid-day break. Before I have a chance to take another spoonful, the foreman is near me and with his large hand grabs the bowl saying "Daj me tego" (give it to me.) I still want to salvage another spoonful and he thunders "Zostaw lyzke," (leave the spoon). He takes the bowl, spoon and the bit of precious soup from me and hands it to a passing by Polish inmate.

The loss of the bowl was a loss but not as great as the bit of soup. The spoon too was a loss for spoons were not supplied in the camp.

That very same afternoon I overheard my Polish foreman saying to a couple passing by Polish inmates; I do not like to supervise Poles. I cannot

beat them and yelling at them does not work. But I do not mind beating Jews.

Still I have to admit that the second day was easier than the first and under the Poles supervision there were no dead casualties.

That day after the appell, entering the stube, I was called over by a French Jew of the forty two thousand who said to me; I saw you working under the supervision of Pilarek. I too work on the "Holtz-Platz" but under the supervision of the tall Pole with the one arm. I want to give you one advise. If you want to live a bit longer, do not attempt to bribe Pilarek. Tomorrow is when they distribute the "Tzulage", the extra half a loaf of bread and a piece of sausage. He, Pilarek, will expect you to bribe him with it so he shall go easier on you. Give him nothing, for if you will, he will expect it every time and without this extra food, you will not last more than a few days even if he will not hit you.

I took his advice seriously. The next day I had Pilarek for my foreman and it was as bad as the first day. The only short escape I discovered was the outdoors toilet. It was exactly as those in Birkenau, a long box with several holes in it. Except that it was smaller, consisting of about a dozen holes. That little building served as a shortlasting refuge where we used to run in to catch our breath and lick our wounds. The only problem was that there was a sort of supervisor appointed by Pilarek whose job it was to make sure that nobody over-stays or rather oversits his allowed couple minutes. That man fulfilled his duty to the letter. Otherwise he would have become Pilarek's victim.

That third day I barely survived. Returning to camp right after the appell, we received the "Tzulage", the additional half a loaf of bread and the piece of sausage. The piece of sausage I exchanged with a Pole for a quarter loaf of bread. Most of the Poles had enough bread and craved sausage. For me, the piece of bread was more filling.

For a small piece of bread, I bought a little cloth pouch in which I put one quarter (ration) of bread for the next day and the remaining half a loaf I ate but still remained hungry. The following day I came to work with the remaining piece of bread in my pouch dangling on my belt for all to see including Pilarek. I will admit there were others like me.

I expected a rough day, but not as rough as it turned out to be. It made the previous day seem like child's play. I could not understand where that beast got the strength to hit so much without a break. He did not forget me either As two of us were carrying two heavy boards, I, in front and another man on the back end, he, Pilarek, got a hold of me. After a few blows on the back

he started hitting me on my legs as his usual style was. Now I really understood how that young man felt on my first day under Pilarek. I no longer felt the blows, for the part of my leg between the knee and ankle was one unbearable pain.

Just as suddenly, he let go of me and started on someone else.

How I survived that day, I do not know, but I managed to get back on my bunk. My legs were covered with bruises, one on top of the other, of all conceivable colors, and swollen to four times the normal size. I took off my shoes that were oozing mud from all day walking in mud and puddles of water created by the constant rain. Taking off my jacket and shirt, I entered the wash room and stacked my legs under the constantly running cold water. After a while my feet began to feel better, or maybe stopped having any feeling. To the touch, they felt like ice. In this condition, I stretched out on my bunk. The total exhaustion put me to sleep in minutes.

Still I went to work the next day. That morning we were bringing in planks into the main factory building, the four story stone building. On the way out, I asked an inmate for directions to the toilet. He directed me to the basement. I sneaked away from my group and made my way there. The toilets there were individual in a tiled and heated room. To my surprise I found there the responsible for half a score in my hundred, the decent, in a sense, humble Pole, who held the job of looking after the toilet room and making sure the inmates do not overstay and do not make a hang out there. I asked him if I am permitted to use the toilet, and he nodded with his head.

I did not feel like leaving that warm place under a roof and not fearing a blow from a stick. Yet I did not want to take advantage of his "Hospitality" nor to impose on him, so I thanked him and left. That day after work when we lined up in hundreds on the factory lot to go back to camp, he asked me where I work. When I told him on the "Holtz-Platz", he said you can come whenever you want.

I tried and learned to avoid working under Pilarek 's supervision as much as possible and prefered to work under the Poles. From him I can get beaten up but not death.

A couple more days pass and it is Sunday again. And again they are rounding up "volunteers" to go unload train loads of bricks, stones, sand, cement, logs and train rails. I look for a way to get out of it. The recruiters are already in the stube (room) and are driving Jews out. There is no place to hide. I look around quickly and see they are too busy pushing and hitting. I slid under the bunks. It is a tight place. Barely enough room for my head to squeeze under. There is no problem with my body. I lie quietly and hope

that nobody noticed me. From my position on the floor I can see many shoes passing by me. I know to whom they belong. The shiny boots to the SS men, the polished almost new leather shoes to the Blockaltester, capos, and their assistants and the worn out or with the wooden soles to us dejected, exhausted, hungry, hopeless Jews.

No, nobody noticed me sliding under the bunk. They are not looking for me. In the stube it is quiet now. I slide out and look around. Nobody even noticed me getting up. I look at the faces that remained in the stube. Like the Stubendienst Kazik (Cazmir), his assistant Wladek Schultzk who despite his German name is through and through a Pole and an raving anti-semite who never misses a chance to tell how he and his classmates in before the war Poland used to break the Jewish store windows. I see the capo of the first alley, Janek G. with half a dozen of his foremen among them the man who sleeps on the bunk over me the number eight hundred and five. Even their personal attendant, a Pole by the name of Zygmund W. Well let it be so, I think to myself. They are big shots, but I see ordinary Poles who work along side the many Jews in D.A.W. Why have they been left alone while every Jew in the stube was taken? I can understand that they have left a German by the name of Lawrence, a red (political) triangle. A man over fifty with a very presentable personality that evokes respect from his appearance and much more from conversation. He must have been some high official or politician in pre Nazi Germany. He would not be taken to such work even though he had no rank or position in camp. A few Poles look at me smiling mildly as if to say; You managed to wiggle out of it, but there was no malice in their faces.

I feel uncomfortable by myself, the only Jew in the stube. The Poles stretch out on their bunks for a nap, but I am uneasy. They might come again for more.

Nobody comes. There is an unreal silence in stube. No Jews to yell at or beat up. The Stubendienst does not yell at Poles. There is a moment of tranquillity in hell. Noon is approaching. The stubendienst (room elder) orders me to take the red bowls from the cupboards and place them on the table. Some prisoners bring in a large wooden barrel with hot soup. It will stay hot until the "volunteers" return when it will be distributed. I am told to sweep the passages between the bunks and throw the bit of dirt in the tile stove that warms our room. I finish my job just before the volunteers return.

They come in dirty and covered with dust. Many beaten up and injured from the sharp objects they handled. I can see the had a hard morning. They scrape off their clothes as much dirt as possible and line up for their liter of

soup. The Stubendienst Kazik dishes out everybody's soup and orders me to collect the empty bowls. After stacking them on the table, he tells me to take them to the wash room and have them washed. After I washed them and put them back in the cupboards he handed me a bowl with soup. If , dear reader, you think that extra liter soup calmed my hunger, you are grossly mistaken. If you find it difficult to understand you know not what hunger is.

At work the following week was no different than the previous one. One might be amazed as to how much a person can take, particularly when one is in good health and at the age of twenty. Besides, I think that Pilarek realized that he will not get anything from me and eased up on me. Not that the work was any easier, it is just that I learned something. I started to go daily and more than once to the toilet where the time keeper was the Pole that was in charge of our unit of ten. There I could sit for ten or even fifteen minutes at a time.

It happened once when that time keeper told a young Pole to get off and out. The young man turned to him and said; Why do you let that Jew sit here, he was here when I came in. To which the time keeper answered; He works on the Holtz Platz the entire day. In the cold and in the rain. You however, work under a roof where it is warm. Besides you do not overwork yourself anyway. It was then that I realized how noble a man he is and how high the standard of his morality is.

Our capos greed was for us a blessing and a curse. His access to the yard of "Canada" which bordered with the yard of D.A.W. and was separated by a wire mesh guarded by SS men, supposedly to get the soup that was left, was not for our benefit but for his. Under the pretext of the soup, during his visits he used to hide on him Jewish belongings of money and jewelery that was being assorted, collected there and whose owners were jut being burned in the crematorium.

I will admit that the extra bit of soup had to a small degree helped to endure the ever present hunger pangs and maybe extended the life span of some of the victims by a few days, but the negative side of it was that the mixture or combination of by then already cold soup with the weakened digestive system of the inmates that had no resistance after a twelve hour work day in early April exposed to constant rain at times freezing, used to cause the soup to go through the body shortly after swollowing it. In short, dysentery in our state, as a rule, spelled death...

This sickness without medical attention can exhaust a healthy and well nourished person in a matter of days, but a hungry emaciated exhausted body, it can kill within the same length of time and it did.

Among our group those that Pilarek did not finish off, perished this way. The only known and available at the time medicine were charcoal pills. The instructions to follow were such; not to eat or drink anything for forty eight hours and take two of those pills three times daily. Not to follow those instructions to the letter meant that the entire effort would be in vain. If it was difficult to resist hunger, it was more so the thirst. Some were strong enough in character to resist temptation, others could not resist taking just one sip of water that spelled death.

Not always were those charcoal pills available, so as a substitute some gnawed on a piece of partly burnt wood that could be easily found around. If chewing the pills used to blacken the teeth, mouth and lips, the piece of wood used to blacken the face and hand that held it to the mouth.

In our group of the fifty-sixty men almost half always had blackened faces. They were candidates to end their lives within the next four-five days.

I too could not remain immune to dysentery and one day was stricken with it. I made many trips to the toilet but just before the work day was over on my way to the toilet I was unable to get there in time and dirtied my underpants. Something I have never done, and in panic, did not know what to do.

Coming into the stube after the appell, I asked the French inmate, the one that advised me not to bribe Pilarek, where can I get a pair of underpants. For a ration (a quarter) of bread, I will get it, he replied. I had my morning ration as I was not eating trying to cure my dysentery on my own, so I gave it to him, wondering at the same time where will he get a pair of drawers. He sticks his hand in his straw sack on which he sleeps and after rummaging in it for a little while, he pulled out a pair of well worn drawers covered with chips of straw.

I think to myself; Learn boy, learn. The man arrived into this camp six months before you, look how much he learned for that time, even to have foresight too provide a pair of drawers for any contigency. Taking the pair of drawers, I went into the almost empty washroom where I undressed and washed in the ice cold water, I pulled on my "newly bought" underpants leaving the dirty ones behind.

As I laid on my bunk, washed and in a clean pair of underpants, without fear of being caught with dirty ones, I suddenly realized the blunder I just committed. I just gave away on entire ration of bread, a days worth of bread. The worth of a human life, (for I have seen men killed for less than this) for a pair of drawers which I have just left behind in the washroom. I could have washed my own dirty ones and still have the ration of bread. To be honest I

did not know that I could wash out a pair of drawers in the washroom or anything else for that matter, especially dirty underpants, what was the hurry? The drawers would have dried out on me and besides, it was only coloured liquid that stained them to begin with.

One is a hero when one is successful. It could have happened that the Blockaltester could have come in and if in a bad mood, he wood have left me dead.

Still I have learned something from that event. In the last two weeks working in the timber yard, I had the opportunity to see many so called "Muselmanner" (prisoners reminiscent of walking dead or walking skeletons). Especially with the coal blackened teeth and lips which signified that at any moment, they will collapse if Pilarek will not get them first. I also knew that if I want to live a bit longer in no way am I to touch any food or drink for the prescribed forty eight hours, by it cheating death.

From carrying the heavy boards, my bony shoulders first become red turning later into blisters which used to crack and turn into sores that would not heal. I started putting my cap on my shoulder under the jacket to cushion the pressure, it helped but not enough. So I picked up some dirty old rags for cushionning.

After another week, I became an old timer on the lumber yard. Pilarek eased up on me a bit. He stopped hitting with the intention of killing me outright but only so as not to be left out of the gang. The Polish foreman was even speaking to me from time to time, never the less continued hitting me, apparently to remind me who he is and who I am.

I used to think that I have no more weight to lose, still Sunday when we used to get shaved, face and head, sitting on the wooden stool, I could feel as if my bare bones are touching the seat. With each passing Sunday, it was getting worse until I no longer could sit on the stool.

Still the worst part was the constant nagging hunger which would not leave for a second. The most trying time was coming back from work right after the appell when we had an hour before the searching for lice in our shirts. I used to spend that time walking all over the camp looking for something to eat, knowing that I will not find anything. The hunger drove me too unreal thoughts like wishing too have teeth of steel so I could bite into the brick walls of the blocks.

After the hour of looking and searching, I used to come back to the stube more tired than before and hungrier than before if it was at all possible. Taking off my shirt, I used to start looking for lice which to my surprise I used to find.

The Stubendienst used to inspect our shirts. At random he used to pick out half a dozen or so of us and himself look at our shirts. Of course he used to find some lice. As luck would have it, one evening he picked me for inspection. Understandably he found one. The following evening after the appell, the Stubendienst took four of us to the bath house for disinfection and shower. My Stubendienst wanted to have his fun so he asked the Polish prisoner that worked there to aim a powerful hose at us.The water was ice cold and knocked us down and pushed us along the slippery boards up to the wall. Changing the direction of the hose the water pushed us to the opposite wall. The Pole with the hose was not particular where he aimed the water, be it body, head of face. When he finished I could not catch my breath due to the water he was aiming in my face. Now the bundles of bruised bones had to pick themselves up and stand under the deliberately boiling water of the shower.

If we suffered from the plague of lice it was nothing in comparison to the sworms of fleas that inhabited the entire camp and from whom there was no hiding place. As a result when we used to get up in the morning, our bodies were covered with countless tiny red dots from their bites. Not having a mirror, I could only see the faces of others and imagined what I looked like.

Against the fleas, shower or individual disinfection did not work. They were everywhere. They were in our bunks, in the cracks in the wood, in the straw sacks we slept on, in the blankets we used to cover with and on the floor.

Against them, the camp administration proclaimed war about which I will write later.

Surprisingly, time did not stay still and what is more, I was still alive, which must have been a great surprise to my overseers and even a greater surprise to myself. I felt, however, that my strength is ebbing and my time is running out. There is nothing of me left but skin and bones. I could collapse at any moment, if not from Pilarek's beating, it will be from hunger, which of the two will come first I did not want to know. It was going on three months me being here. Even according to Nazi admittance, an inmate could not survive more than three months in camp unless he got extra food. This extra food privilage excluded Jews who were not permitted to correspond with the outside nor did they have with whom. Their families and relatives came with them or separately to Auschwitz and went right away into the gas chambers. All others except Russians could and did correspond with their families and received food parcels from home. Here again I like to point out that there

were inmates who worked at jobs where they could procure food or other things which could be exchanged for food.

All those better jobs or positions even ranks were taken up by German and Polish prisoners which led to a constant struggle between the inmates of those two nationalities over the control of those choice positions.

Not only did that struggle go on between those two groups for good jobs, but over ranks, too. If and when a Blockaltester or capo left Auschwitz (not voluntarily) what was referred to as to go on a "transport" to another camp in Germany, both of those groups attempted to replace that man with one of their own.

In any case, inmates from other nationalities were not in such dire need of food as we Jews, nor were they being forced to do the heavy work that we Jews were doing. Thus they lived in relative safety and waiting for the war to end. We Jews that were the majority in Auschwitz and in almost exclusive Jewish Birkenau were relagated to do the most exerting work under the most inhumane conditions and were falling by the drove.

Is it than a wonder that I felt that I am on my last leg. I like to mention that during that time I had a second bout with dysentery that almost killed me.

In early May 1943 I felt that my end is near. At that time I had three hellish months of Auschwitz experience behind me and knew exactly where I stand. I did not think that I will last through the week.

A couple days later on Sunday evening, as I stayed near the bunk with my turned out shirts in my hands looking for lice, the Pole Leon Kulowski, the inmate number eight zero five, who was sleeping on the bunk above me, was making his way through the congested hallway to his bunk. Apparently, I was in his way for he asked me to let him pass. As a rule he used to spend the hour or hour and a half between the evening appell and lights out with the other prominent inmates around the front table where no Jew dared to sit down. He only used to find himself among us on his way to the bunk. This time he noticed me and asked; Where do you work? On the Holtz-Platz I answered. Under whose supervision? Under Pilarek's I said. How long have you been working there? Six weeks, I replied. You survived there under Pilarek six weeks? He asked with astonishment. Without a word, he turned to capo Janek G. who was by the way his capo, his supervisor but also his friend and with a loud voice so as the capo should hear it over the noise in the stube, he said; Janek, take him to you in the halle.

Here I would like to point out that the capo Janek G. was the capo over halle number one, a carpenter shop where one hundred and fifty prisoners

worked. It was part of D.A.W. complex where twelve hundred men worked, more than half of them carpenters.

The capo answered him with the same loud voice, " You know Leon that I can not take him from there without his capos permission."

I never expected that someone will ever intervene on my behalf in this hell. Suddenly I saw a tiny spark of hope. I grabbed the opportunity and said; My capo said that he has no more use of me and I can leave whenever I want. If such is the case, said the capo, tomorrow (Monday) morning when we all get to the factory and you hear the command, "commandos fall in", you line up with my people.

Next morning as we got to the yard of D.A.W. and I have heard the sound of "commandos fall in", instead of running to my former group, I ran to the group of Halle number one. Before going into the halle to work, the halle schreiber (registrar) goes by with a list and checks off every worker from his list. He gets to me and says: What are you doing here? With apprehension I answer: ask the capo. The registrar turns to the capo, who is some twenty meters away and yells: Mr. Capo, what about him pointing to me. The capo looks at me and says; write him down.

The entire group enters the halle. Everybody goes to his place and I remain standing. The capo leads me to a work bench at which a French Jew works. He is from the forty two thousand transport, by the name Itzik. The capo says to him; "Here is your helper." The man is so busy at his work, that he does not even look at me. As soon as the capo walks away, that Itzik says to me: Do you see what I am doing While staying near him two minutes, I have noticed that he managed to fit in four "L" shaped metal brackets in each of the two halves of the window's wooden corners and attach the two half windows to the window frame with the help of four hinges, thus making them ready to be put into the window sill.

In my life I have not seen a craftsman working with such speed. To his question, I nodded with my head not understanding his hurry. Here I can work by myself, he said, you will just be in my way. Do you see the line of people over there, he continued, pointing at a few men staying in line near a wall. You stay in that line and when an unfinished wooden window is ready, bring it to me.

I do not exactly understand what he means and he does not attempt to explain. I go over to that line. There are about six or eight men ahead of me, each waiting for a wooden window that is being glued together in front of us from prefabricated pieces. As soon as one is ready, the first in line takes it to his master craftsman.

It is obvious to me that I will have to wait in line for a window some ten minutes and I utilize the time in looking around and striking up a conversation with the ones in line. They tell me that there is no beating in the halle. The capo carries no stick, but the inmates work hard on their own initiative. The capo used a carrot instead of a stick. As reward for producing the greatest amount of work in each department, the capo gives that inmate an additional liter of soup. It is for that liter of soup that those craftsmen work harder than they have ever worked in their lives.

How lucky I am, I think to myself. That I am here instead of the "Holtz-Platz", spending there the twelve hour work day out-doors, exposed constantly to the freezing rain or wet snow under Pilarek's constant beating with the knowledge that within a matter of a few more days, I will succumb to Pilarek's stick.

Here, under a roof in comparative warmth, without the beatings, I simply do not believe my good fortune.

I am next in line. I grab the window and run to my boss. As soon as I put it on the work bench, he says to me; Run for another one. The distance to the line is some twenty five meters. I cover it in a couple of seconds and I am back in line waiting for ten-fifteen minutes to get a window. I wonder if it is a sweet dream in the middle of a nightmare? I look around and see a couple more young men from Shershev. They are older than I and carpenters by trade. I see the two brothers Shepsl and Itzl Pomeranietz. Shepsl is ten years older than I. Itzl is two years his junior. He participated in the Polish German campaign, was taken prisoner and remained in Nazi occupied Poland until the German attack on the Soviet Union when he made his way to Pruzany where he found his parents, brother and sister Drezl who married during the Bolshevic era to a Shershev young man Berl Tenenbaum, a carpenter too who works there. I am delighted to find soome men from Shershev.

The morning goes by quickly. The whistle tells us that it is noon and we get the bowl of soup. I enter the halle with my soup and eat sitting with my townspeople under a roof where it is warm.

I just finished my soup when I see my boss-master, the French Jew passing by. He says to me, "come." Without a question, I follow him up to the door of the office. Near the door I see a small barrel with soup. Around it I see the capo, a couple foremen, the halle registrar and the Pole who attends the capo and the foremen. He is also the one who dishes out the soup.

The schreiber (registrar) calls out the numbers of those who produced the most in every part of the chain production like who made the largest number

of window parts, who glued them together, who put in them the largest amount of brackets and hinges and so on.

I look on as every well performing, fastest worker approaches and gets a liter of soup. I see my boss walks over and gets his. He looks around and notices me at a distance and says in a loud and indignant voice: Nu? what are you waiting for. I walk over slowly, hesitatingly, wondering if I will get the liter of soup or a blow with the dipper over the head. The fellow pours me a ladle full of soup and I do not believe my eyes. Am I dreaming?

After the break, everybody goes back to his job. A short while later, as I am putting down a window on the work bench which was not far from the side door through which all planks and timber used to be brought in, the wide door opens up and in come my former co workers from the lumber yard with heavy boards on their shoulders. Leading them is the murderous Pilarek. He immediately noticed me. Approaching me, he said: What are you doing here? Out of sheer fear, I could not open my mouth. Not that I had something to tell him. Pilarek knew that in the factory he had no authority. As soon as his men dumped the loads, they all left.

It did not take more than ten minutes, when I see my former capo, the capo from the "Holtz-Platz" marching into the halley and going straight to the door of the office of my new capo Janek G. I knew immediately that it is a bad omen.

By rule capos in D.A.W. did not visit departments under the authority of other capos. Therefore when this capo entered, he was noticed by everyone in the halley. A couple minutes after he entered the office I was called in there. As soon as I closed the door behind me, my new capo says to me; You lied to me. You told me that you have his permission to change jobs. He is here to take you back, and points at my former capo.

True I did lie to him, but did I commit such a big crime by telling a little white lie in order to save my life if even temporarily?

I know whom I am facing. The better one of the two capos, Janek G, who took me into his part of the factory did it because of the intervention of his friend Leon Kulowski. He, himself, does not owe me anything nor do I mean anything to him. I am just another Jew one of thousands that die in this kingdom of death daily. He will not jeopardize his friendship, nor even acquaintance with another capo, especially a German capo, for the sake of a Jew. The second, my former capo, the German with the green triangle (professional criminal) under whose supervision half a dozen Jews die daily due to hard work and beatings and whose authority is now being challenged

by a half dead Jew whom he now came to claim in order to show an example to others.

If I had something to say in my defense, I do not remember, but I remember that before I had a chance to open my mouth, my new capo gave me a slap in the face. I do not remember feeling the slap but I remember noticing the floor coming towards me and suddenly I realized that I am lying on the floor and hearing my new capo saying to me: Pick yourself up and get out of here.

Getting up I think to myself: It was too good to last. Was it worth while to taste a couple hours of rest in order to be beaten to death by Pilarek? As if going to my own funeral, I am going out the office with the intention to walk through the halley door to the outside where Pilarek is waiting to finish me with his stick or be throttled by it. I barely manage to walk two or three steps from the office when I am confronted by Leon Kulowski, the one who got me the new job to begin with. He, just as everybody else in the halley noticed the capo of the lumber yard walking through and entering the capo's office. When he saw me being called into the office, he immediately guessed what it is all about and knew how it will end. By the time he got to me, it was all over. He grabbed me by my shoulders, pushed me to the wall of the office next to the door saying; Stay here, do not move from here. He stepped into the office. Within six or seven minutes, he was out giving me a friendly slap on the back he said, "go back to your job."

How I felt at that moment, is now over fifty years later, difficult to describe. It will suffice to say that I knew then only too well that he just saved my life. (Thank you uncle Leon!!!)

Today, fifty plus years later, that episode is still vivid in my memory and before my eyes. Through all those years, my gratitude towards that man, my benefactor, did not diminish nor did it lessen by an iota.

When the production of windows was finished, we started making barrack walls. The very same as those in Birkenau in which we spent our first six weeks. Those were standard size barracks which used to be bolted together from parts that we were making, the so called "Pferdestall-Barracken, Typ - OKH No. 260/9" (prefab stable huts 40x9.5 m. 2.65 m in height).

If those particular barracks were destined for Birkenau which was continuously expanding or other camps I did not know. I know however, that the building of those parts went on for a very long time. As building the barrack parts required several men, the competition for speedy production could not be implemented and I stopped getting the extra liter of soup.

The gnawing hunger did not let up for a moment and of course the worst time was between the evening appell and lice appell (lice searching).

Here I want to mention that the battle against the lice was won not later than six weeks after one was found on my shirt and the special treatment in the bath house. At that time just about everybody in our stube or in the entire block or even in the entire cap had lice. It was only thanks to the perseverance of the camp administration that we got rid of them.

Each block was being taken to the bath house once a week, leaving our dirty underwear on a pile in the stube. After a hot shower, we run back naked to the stube where we used to get clean underwear. Interesting to mention that no one got sick or a cold running from under a hot shower to the bloock naked, be it summer or winter.

Since the moment the Pole Leon Kulowski intervened on my behalf and by it I consider it saving my life, I kept on looking for a way to reciprocate for his deed. But how? The only tangible item in camp was food, but here the shoe was on the other foot. I was the hungry, the starving one, not him. He was the big shot, the foreman under the protection of a powerful capo who was his close friend. How could I reciprocate?

All the big shot inmates had enough food and wore brand new clothing that fitted them as if made to measure. Their footwear was the best that Bata of Czechoslovakia could make and it came to Auschwitz on the feet of Czech Jews. The Jews went straight to the gas chambers, leaving their footwear and clothing for others to wear.

Even those big shots underwear used to be the best which was not thrown on the pile with the others before a shower. Their attendant, the young Pole Zygmund W. used to find somebody to do their washing and shoe polishing.

It occured to me to ask my benefactor Leon Kulowski if I could polish his shoes. He agreed. After several evenings of polishing his shoes, I was approached by their attendant Zygmund asking me to do the shoes of the other big shots. I accepted his proposition gladly. Firstly, I wanted to be on their good side, secondly, I did not hold anything against the capo for the slap on the face in his office. I knew that he could not act any other way and thirdly, the most important reason was that I hoped for some reward. It came on Sunday when we received our soup in the stube. They, the prominent inmates rarely ate the soup. They used to take a couple of spoonfuls, turned up the noses and leave it. Their attendant Zygmund W. used to look for and as a rule find a hungry Pole and give it to him. That Sunday, however, he did not look for anyone but gave it to me.

If anybody thinks that with a couple extra bowls of soup one can fill up a hungry stomach, that was empty for continuous three months, is grossly mistaken. In any case, not the kind of hunger we knew in Auschwitz.

Never the less, that Sunday was a good day for me. I do not know if at that moment I realized how low morally I sunk that a couple bowls of soup could bring the heavens down to me. But then again who can understand Auschwitz except the ones who were there.

Shortly after becoming their shoe polisher, I also started to wash their laundry. Their shoes had to be polished almost every day as the grounds of the factory used to turn muddy after the frequent rains. In the beginning their attendant used to give me a piece of soap to wash their laundry, for the small piece of soap we used to receive once a month did not produce suds. One could never wash a shirt with it and hope to make it look white or clean. The piece of soap we used to get was the size of a match box. On either side of it were imprinted three letters R.J.F. which gave credence to the rumors circulating in camp that it is made from the fat of Jewish bodies that were being burned in the crematoriums. We, inmates, had good reason to believe those rumors. Those three letters only substantiated our believe as the three letters R.J.F. stood for "Rain Juden Fets" (pure Jewish fat). That the Nazis were capable of doing it we knew only too well. We also suspected that they were deliberately imprinting those three letters on the soap to add insult to injury. To laugh in our faces so to speak, by showing us how lawless their world can be and how wanton, immoral and merciless they themselves are. Not to mention the fact that they were showing us how abandoned we were by the indifferent and uncaring world.

However, the soap that Zygmund used to give me, he used to get through negotiations that used to take place in camp. The soap found its way in camp from the continuous train loads of Jews that were being brought to Auschwitz from Nazi occupied Europe. The newly arriving Jews were being led straight to the gas chambers and their belongings were being assorted to be shipped to Germany, but the inmates working at it used to manage to sneak some of it into the camp. True, they risked their life by doing it, but some did it to help a relative or friend.

It should be emphasized that those working at assorting the luggage of the constantly arriving Jews were in an ironic way considered to be the better off in camp. If any Jew would dare to hope of surviving the camp, it had to be them. Still they did risk to carry something from their work place into camp in order to help somebody else. Like a piece of soap or a box of shoe polish that could fetch a daily portion of bread. I am writing it as a testament

to the measure of devotion that some had to relatives or friends and the price they were willing to pay for it.

A couple weeks later the attendant Zygmund tells me that he has no more soap. Handing me half a loaf of bread, he tells me to go and buy somewhere some soap. Fortunately I knew a man in our stube that seeing me once washing their laundry asked if I need soap. This time I approached him and bought from him a piece for half a loaf of bread.

It is worth while mentioning that during the entire year that I did their laundry and was buying soap, I never succeeded in profiting even one bite of bread through the soap transaction, nor did I ever get rewarded with a piece of bread. Those big shots used to pay me up with the soup that they seldom ate anyway, while the nagging hunger kept on gnawing at my insides without respite.

The end of April and the month of May were very difficult. It seemed that there is no way to satisfy my hunger. All my thoughts were taken up with thoughts of food. How I used to regret the times when my mother used to put food in front of me and I refused to eat. Those thoughts used to alternate with thoughts of my family that perished in that very place and I used to reprove and chastise myself for having thoughts about food.

The only day that common sense would dictate that I should have been full was Sunday. It was on Sunday that besides my liter of soup I used to get one for collecting and washing the bowls of our stube. Besides a couple of liters that the attendant Zygmund used to give me for doing the laundry and polishing the shoes. Still I never felt full. True, the soup was 95% water, but it went into my stomach. Yet I never felt even a temporary fullness.

Once marching to work we bypassed a line of empty freight cars which apparently have been unloaded the day before. They must have contained raw turnips, for there were tiny turnips scattered nearby. They were no more than two centimeters across. They were shriveled, pitiful things not even fit for camp consumption. The cars were no more than ten meters from us, but to get out of line was prohibited. To try and grab a couple tiny turnips and get caught meant at least a good beating or worse. I could not stand the temptation. I ran out and grabbed a few little turnips. Luck was with me. None of the capos or SS men noticed.

A few days later passing by the same way, I noticed tiny beets. Again I run out and grabbed a few without being seen. The following morning urinating, I noticed that the urine was red, but a day later it returned to normal. I understood that it must have been from the beets.

The many train loads of Jews from across Nazi occupied Europe did not only bring with them the valuables and attire, they also took with them provision for the trip. Many did not finish all their food or taking in consideration the mood, state of mind they were in, did not eat at all and arrived with their provisions intact. There, upon arrival, the food and anything else they brought with them was of no more use to them as they were taken straight to the gas chambers and eternal rest, leaving all they brought for the living.

Because of the large diversity (assortment) of baked stuff, it could not be used as a daily ration for the inmates. The administration decided to make a soup from it which was called "Khlebuvka" from the Polish word "Khleb" (bread). This soup used to contain at times pieces and crumbs of cake which gave it a sweet taste. There was not enough soup to go around the entire camp, so every evening a different block used to receive it.

The evening when we used to get the soup I used to get some from my superiors whose laundry I used to do. A few times happened that I had what I thought morally to be enough and wanted to share some of the soup with a less fortunate than I.

Above us on the upper level in Block 18A, slept a young man from Shershev by the name of Moishe Eli Shocherman, some 3-4 years older than I, a carpenter by trade. A very likable young man with a good disposition. He worked in the next alley to us in D.A.W. Whenever we used to see each other during the noon break, he always had a joke, a smile or a cheerful word.

Several times I took up to him some bread-soup. Not that I could not eat it myself, I just wanted to share my temporary good fortune with a friend.

Behind the last row of blocks, that is behind the blocks no. 1 to no. 11 was a long walkway. It was cobblestone paved unlike the rest of the camp which was asphalted. Part of that walkway had young birch trees on either side. That walkway served aa a gathering place for many inmates, especially Jews, on Sunday mornings. One could hear there many European languages, like French, Flemish, German, Polish, Czech, Slovac and Greek. All coming out of Jewish mouths. But the prevelant language was Yiddish.

It happened in the early lean Sunday mornings that I met there a friend from my childhood days, Herschl Shneider. We were both delighted to see each other indeed like long lost friends. Although my stomach growelled from hunger and I am sure so was his, we did not want to part and walked around for a couple of hours oblivious of the mob around.

We met a couple consecutive Sundays and then our meetings stopped. Why we stopped meeting, I do not remember. It could be that I started to do the laundry for my superiors, or maybe had to wait for their soup, my reward for my labor. After all, the extra Sunday's soup sustained me to a certain degree till the next Sunday. It is possible that Herschl Shneider stopped coming for whatever reason. In any case he was my only childhood friend that I saw in Auschwitz and spent few hours with, talking about home and family. How dear those hours were. I do not even know how, when and in what circumstances he perished.

From my later day friends, I was the only one that ended up in Auschwitz. The others, like Itzik Maletzky was shot after escaping from the ghetto, Kalman Kalbkoif hid in a hiding place in the ghetto, was found and shot, Meir Kalbkoif perished in Drohychyn and the brothers Laizer and Litek Rotenberg perished in Chomsk.

A few weeks after loosing contact with Herschl Shneiderl, I met Yankl Feinbir. A man some twelve years my senior, that is a man of thirty two when I saw him in Auschwitz. He looked as emaciated as we all, which surprised me for in Shershev he was considered to be a resourceful young man and I expected him to be able to fend for himself even in Auschwitz.

Speaking to him I had an urge to remind him of his foolish act he committed by leaving the land of Israel, then Palestine, in the late thirties, after spending there six months and returned to Shershev. How happy he could have been now. So he returned to Shershev to end up in Auschwitz.

Of course I said nothing. I did not have to....The constant arrival of train loads of Jews brought about the distribution of bread soup twice a week. While eating or sipping the soup, I could not drive out of my mind the thought that I am sipping Jewish life blood. They, the Jews who brought the bread are being burned now in the crematorium and I am eating their bread. The same thought I am sure occurred to the hundreds and thousands of other Jewish inmates while eating that soup. Yet I looked forward to the days when we used to get the soup at night.

If there is a moral justification for our eatung the soup, if placing it side by side our thoughts, I can not say now, but I do believe that only the one that was there and tried to extend his miserable existence for an extra few days has a right to give an answer.

Not being a carpenter I worked as an assistant, thus being forced to work at different jobs and places. Still I did some work and even learned to use carpenter tools

I like to point out again that the great majority of tradesmen and artisants in eastern Poland were Jews and it is no wonder that of the hundred and fifty carpenters in our halley, one hundred and twenty five were Jews. Of them were some twenty five from the ghetto Pruzany alone. Among them soome half a dozen from Shershev. Others were from Grodno, Wolkowisk, Bialistok, Mlawa and others.

At the end of May or beginning of June, the capo's attendant, Zygmund, called me into the office and gave me a tin of canned meat to bring into camp. To say that I was happy with that mission would be a big lie, for quite often the SS used to conduct searches at the entrance of the camp and woe to him who was found with something illegal. A man from my stube was caught with a tin of shoe polish. He was taken to the "bunker" (a punishment block) and was never seen again.

But what choice did I have? To refuse would mean not only the bit of soup that I used to get from him, but also expulsion from the halley back to the "Holtz Platz" Fortunately there were no searches that day and I passed safely. From then on I seldom used to return from work without carrying something illegal. To my daily problem of trying to procure a bit of extra soup, was added the fear of being cought entering the camp with something forbidden.

Usually it used to be a small item like a tin of sardines, fish or meat that would go into a pocket, but I used to put it into my pouch in which I used to carry the extra piece of bread from the "Tzulage" (additional ration) to eat at work. On the way back, the pouch used to be empty, so I used to put that tin in it. Tying the cords of the pouch to my belt, I used to slide the pouch inside my pants letting it tangle between my legs.

With such masses of inmates marching in from work, searches could not be thorough and on a hungry emaciated, literally starving inmate, one could not likely find something of value. So the searcher used to be satisfied by feeling the pockets and protruding lumps of the loosely hanging jackets on the inmates skinny bodies.

Once a searcher found on me my pocket knife, he must have liked it, for he put it in his pocket and let me go. I considered myself lucky.

To make the searches more thorough, the SS men discontinue the searches at the gate as it used to delay the counting and ordered the marchers to continue into the camp and line up on the appell-zlatz in front of the kitchen. The surrounded inmates were then searched more thoroughly.

During that time Zygmund called me in the office and gave me a round thin with fish or meat to take into the camp. It must have weighed a

kilogram. I put it into the pouch and tied it to the belt as any other time. I looked down to below my stomach and realized the immense bulge that even a blind person could notice. I knew that if there will be a search it will spell my end. I wanted to say no, that I can not take it but I did not dare. My only hope was that today they will not search, but even without a search, it was very noticeable and I could be stopped at the gate.

We march to the camp. The gate gets closer and my fear more intense. We pass the gate and are in the camp. I am ready to start breathing easier when suddenly we are encircled by SS men and Blockaltesters and led to the appell platz to be searched.

Now, I think to myself I will pay for everything. We stand in rows of five and being searched by five men. They stand in front of us and we approach them five at a time. I know that as soon as the line of five in front of me will be through, the searcher will immediately notice the bulge under my stomach. I put my legs apart putting my hand in my deep pocket, I push the can deep behind me and bring my legs together. The bulge disappears, but what it looks from the back, I do not know. The SS men and Blockaltester might see it but I can not help it. I approach the SS man keeping my feet close together. He slides his hands over my pockets and around my waist and says "go". With my first normal step, the heavy tin in the pouch swings forwards and it is back in the previous place where it can not be seen from the back. With fast steps, I go to the block. After the appell, when I gave the tin to Zygmond W, he was not only surprised but astonished. How did you do it? He asked. I just shrugged my shoulders. What could I have said? That deep in my heart, I still believe in miracles or that in a deep and hidden corner of my heart I believe that my mother's soul watches over me. And where? Of all places, in Auschwitz?

With time I became the regular transporter or smuggler for my superiors. It got to the point where I was seldom coming into camp from work without having anything on me that could send me to my death

Among the few prominent inmates in my stube, were two "Vorarbeiter" (foremen) with black triangles (asocial or so called saboteurs). A rarity among Polish prisoners. Both in the middle twenties. One a well fed man by the name of Lutek. He indeed was a professional criminal. Mostly a petty thief and like many in his profession, he was mischievous yet fraternal who sympathized with the underdog and oppressed which included Jews.

No wonder he was liked among the Jewish workers in halley. With his reputation of a criminal, he was respected among his own Poles.

Quite often in the evenings the big shots used to sit around the table telling stories about life before the war. I recall as that Lutek told a story about his town "Krakow" and how he in his early career used to break into Jewish homes on "Kol Nidre" night (prayer recited on Yom Kipper eve) knowing that there is no Jew at home as they were in synagogues that night. He even knew how long that prayer took and at what time the worshippers got back home. Still I never heard him utter a contemptuous word about Jews. I have the feeling that he yearned for the Jewish Krakow which he knew is no more.

Apparently his acquired profession took the better of him, for seeing the riches that are arriving daily with the thousands of Jews, he decided to take advantage and try to benefit from it. He managed to reach to the higher ups in the camp administration to be transferred to Birkenau, as it was closer to the arriving trains and the source of the valuables.

When Lutek left our stube, his bunk that was in a honorable place, right near the table around which all the big shots slept, and a Jew would not be allowed to sleep there, was given to Leon Kulowski, my benefactor. Leon's bunk was taken over by a newly arrived Pole of somewhere between fifty and sixty years old. I doubt if there was an older inmate in camp. The man by the name of Szewczyk due to his age was patronized by the much younger Poles who provided him with an easy job. This man thanks to the many and ample parcels that he used to get from home, managed to survive at least until we parted in 1944. It was thanks to those parcels that opened doors for him. Even the well fed Stubendienst who assigned him the bunk on the third tier used to look up to him like a dog waiting for something to be thrown to him, while the old man used to sit on his bunk opening his just arrived parcel. There was usually something for the Stubendienst, as a rule a piece of cake or some other sweets.

That Mr. Szewczyk kept to himself. Firstly because of his age, he was twice as old as the older men in our stube, and three times as old as many of us, including myself. Secondly, he used to receive more and better parcels from home than the other Poles in our stube which no doubt caused envy among the Polish inmates that they skillfully concealed.

We, the Jewish inmates considered him an angle and no wonder. While most non Jewish inmates looked upon us Jews with scorn, he acted towards us Jews in our stube with compassion, demonstrating it by action. As I mentioned earlier, he used to receive parcels regularly, besides everything else, each parcel used to contain two loaves of bread. When he was through with putting everything away, he used to spread his jacket on the bunk and

cut up the two loaves in pieces. Handing me the jacket full of bread, he used to climb down from his bunk taking the jacket from me, he used to say, "you do not need it so badly as those poor souls," motioning with his hand in the direction of the other Jews in the stube, he used to start handing out a piece of bread to every Jew, making sure that every Jew got a piece. The only one that did not was I, and G-d only knew that I could use it, but that did not diminish my respect nor lessened my difference for that saintly man who proved to me in that hell called Auschwitz that there are still people with morals and principles who can rise above the multitude to give hope and yes life, for bread was life, to the hopeless.

Sometime in June the camp bakery needed some carpenter work to be done. The SS chief of the bakery asked my capo to send some men. Among the half a dozen men was a man from ghetto Pruzany named Hershl Morawsky, a top notch carpenter whom the capo used to send to many outside places where something could be acquired on the quiet for him.

Understandably everybody would have liked to work in the bakery where regardless of the many watching eyes, one could swipe some bread and eat it on the quiet, even hide a piece on oneself.

The bakery used to bake the so called regular camp bread for the camp and a special white bread for the prominent sick inmates for whom the doctors used to prescribe that bred. It was that white bread that my capo and his buddies craved.

Hershl Morawski used to find a way to get this bread and bring it safely to the factory. But it was up to me to get it into the camp. Everyday before leaving the factory, I used to go to the office where that attendant Zygmund used to give me a white loaf of bread which I used to stick behind the belt of my pants. Wearing the buttoned up jacket, it could not be detected. During the frequent searches, I used to push out my chest and pull in the stomach, if one could call it stomach, so the formed cavity could have hidden two loaves.

Right after entering the camp, we had to fall in for the appell. After the appell, we were permitted to enter the stube. I had to pull the bread out from under my jacket and be careful not to be seen by anybody. Of course the French Jew that slept below me and the saintly elderlyt Pole, Szewczyk could not help but see it,. A couple of times, he warned me saying; you should not do it for them, for you will pay with your life for it.

How could that elderly worthy of veneration Pole understand that by my daily risking my life so that they, the big shot inmates, could have in camp better than the people outside are paying me off with the couple liters of soup a week that they would not eat. Not to mention the doing their laundry and

polishing their shoes. Yet I still admit that without that extra soup at that time, I would not have survived and would not live to write about it.

Up to now I have depicted most Poles in a negative way even with scorn, with very few exceptions, like the Polish bath room attendant that used to permit me to spend extra ten or fifteen minutes under a roof and in the warmth every time I had the chance to disappear from the murderous blows of Pilarek's stick. That Pole did not owe me anything nor did he know me except for my number among ten that he was to check up on his list on the way to and from work. He did not know my name even, nor did I know his.

Or the Pole Leon Kulowsky who got me the job in the carpenter shop and protected me from being thrown out when my former capo came to claim me back, which in a sense would have spelled my doom, or the elderly Pole Szewczyk who used to divide some seventy slices of bread among the seventy Jews in my stube, in a time when hundreds or rather thousands of starving Jews paid with their lives trying to procure a mouthful of bread or a couple potatoes. Whether that piece of bread saved a life is difficult to say, but in a place and at a time where one hour could be decisive not to mention a whole day during which one's life could turn upside down and very often did and if that piece of bread helped that particular inmate to survive that day, then who knows if that piece of bread did not contribute to the survival of someone, or more than one Jew.

I have already mentioned my benefactor, Leon Kulowski, yet I would like to add that even when he was moved to a more prestigious bunk next to the table, he kept on protesting to the Stubendienst about his assistant, by the name of Wladek Shultz (a Pole) constantly beating the Jews for absolutely no reason what so ever. If there were such decent Poles in the other stubes, I would not know for all the Jews on my block were in my stube. In fact a Jew would not dare walk into another stube.

Even after Leon Kulowski was moved further, he was still bringing over his soup to me on Sundays and once or twice a week in the evening when we used to get the bread soup.

It was in the middle of June 1943 after coming from work to the camp, right after the appell, we passed a very strict selection during which several young Jewish boys from my stube were marked down. They were young men, rather no more than boys, my age and younger from Holland and Belgium. They were fine and intelligent young men who were brought to Auschwitz three months before me and by June were completely exhausted, literally skin and bones, the proverbial "Muselmann." In them I saw the

reflection of myself and wondered how long will it be to my being in their place.

The process by which the selection of the Jewish inmates used to take place was as follows. (Selections were conducted only on Jews.) When the evening appell was over, all Jews were ordered to remain in place while all other inmates were told to go into the blocks and were locked in. The Jews were then ordered to get completely undressed taking the bundles of clothes under one arm, we were marched five abreast block by block to the front of the kitchen where among a group of SS men stood the infamous angel of death doctor Mengele. There surrounded by SS men, Blockaltster and other trustees, we lined up in a single file to march by the dreaded Dr. Mengele. Before approaching him, many used to put out the chest taking in as much air as possible to expand the stomach in order to appear a bit heftier than in reality. With a hardent prayer in our hearts, we confronted our destiny.

It was then that our prayer was most sincere. With the thought that only G -D can help, we passed by him. Unfortunately, not every prayer was answered. All it took was the pointing of the finger or the slight motion of his hand to send you to your death. The moment you were pointed out, a Blockaltester or capo immediately wrote down your number and sent you to your block. The next morning as we got up, the block schreiber (registrar) use to came into our stube reading out the numbers of those unfortunates that were marked down, collecting them, he would lead them out to the appell where they stood separate as if they were already dead. After all others went to work, the poor souls were gathered from all the other blocks and led on foot the three kilometers to Birkenau gas chambers

If I expressed myself by saying that it was a strict selection, I want to substantiate it with figures. Taking in consideration that there were seventy Jews in my stube and six or seven were marked down, this constituted ten percent. The same percentage was applicable to every block in Auschwitz. Considering that in Auschwitz proper there were eighteen thousand inmates of which seventy five percent were Jews, one has to conclude that somewhere between twelve and fifteen hundred Jewish inmates were taken from Auschwitz alone. As Birkenau numbered twenty two thousand and ninety percent of them were Jewish, the number taken from there in that seletion was much larger than in Auschwitz proper. In general the selections in Birkenau were conducted with much greater severity than in Auschwitz. I shudder to think about the twenty seven thousand Jewish women that were interned in Birkenau that represented ninety five percent of the total female inmate population. Here we are speaking about a time when selections for

the gas chambers among the Jewish inmate population was not an exception but the rule, the working principle of Auschwitz in summer of 1943.As soon as the arriving of train loads of Jews eased up a bit, when a day or two that the gas chambers stood empty and the ovens of the crematoriums began to cool, the Nazis started to select the weaker, the exhausted souls in the camp and replace them with the new arriving healthy men that kept on coming continuously.

I started to write about that particular selection to point out the uniqueness or singularity and special character of that Pole Leon Kulowsky. When after the above mentioned selection was over and we were all back in the stube, the depressing mood was so heavy that it reflected on some of the non Jewish faces. It just happened that as we came into the stube we saw a barrel with bread soup. As a rule the sight of some food used to improve our mood. But after the cruelty of the selection, with those marked down, among us, the prospect of a bit of soup failed to cheer us up.,

As I stood near my bunk which was above the bottom one and at the height of my arms, with my elbows resting on the bunk supporting my chin with the palms of my hands trying to recover or shake out from the experience of the last hour, I was approached by Leon Kulowsky, with a worrysome quiet voice he asked; Did they mark you down? Just as quietly I answered "No." He turns around, walks back to the place at the table where he just sat, picks up his bowl of soup, brings it over to me and says, Here, try to put some weight on.

At that time I was well acquainted with the outlay of the camp. I knew which commandos (working groups) are in which block. From block number one where the bath house was up to block number 28 which was the "Krankenbau" (camp hospital). Block 24 whose main floor contained a display and collection of Jewish religious articles and the floor above was a brothel frequented by priviledged non Jewish inmates. Blocl 25, the canteen, next to it, a wooden barrack that was called the "Packettenstalle" where parcels for the inmates used to arrive and be inspected. Block 11 where the Nazis kept four hundred young Jewish women on whom they used to perform all kinds of terrible operations and experiments. As a rule they were kept inside the block and no inmate was allowed in, but from time to time they used to be escorted by SS men on a walk around the camp.

We used to see them sometimes on a Sunday walking in slow steps like at a funeral which in a sense it was their own. For the mortality among them was immense, but those that died or were killed were easily replaced by

constantly new arriving Jews in Auschwitz. The Nazis had an inexhaustible source of guinea pigs which came unfortunately in the purest human form.

Next to block eleven was block ten which was better known by its fearsome name the "Bunker". It was famous for its so called "Stehzelle" (stand cells) where inmates used to be crammed in individual or in groups of four with no room to sit down and after standing all night, go to a twelve hour work day for a certain length of days or weeks. Of course many succumbed. For a lesser crime an inmate used to receive 25 or 50 lashes. Not many survived fifty. There was a stone wall between block ten and eleven, in front of which many were executed.

Poles especially feared the bunker. Some individual Poles were brought from jails, others straight from homes or streets arrested for imaginery or real crimes. Many were accused of anti German activities. They were kept in camp and after some weeks or months real offenders were taken to the bunker and shot but the great majority were kept in the camp. Jews feared less the bunker as our fate was anyway to die. For us Jews there was no hope of getting out alive, while all others had a time to serve. Besides, gas chambers and selections were reserved for Jews only.

Still for any transgression in camp many Jews were sent to the bunker. Some got out after a few days others not at all. In my stube was a young man from Pruzany, his first name was Yankl. (I forgot his family name.) He was caught at a gate search with a small tin of shoe polish and was taken to the bunker and we never heard of him again.

The SS man in charge of the bunker was a tall and husky red head who carried an animosity towards Russians or Russian inmates. Whenever he walked through the camp on his way to the bunker, he never missed the opportunity to kick the Russian prisoners that came his way. At such a time and place it was strange to see him kicking non Jews while there were so many Jews around.

Shortly before I left Auschwitz for Sosnowitz, that SS man ceased to be seen. There were rumors that he had an affair with one of the Jewish girls in the experimental block and supposedly tried to get her out. He was caught and sent to the Russian front.

How much truth there is to that story, I can not say. However, this is the rumor that was circulating.

The above described SS man had a couple subordinates in the bunker. A Pole and a Jew. Who the Pole was, I did not know nor do I know now, but the Jew was known to me. In fact he was known to most Polish Jews. He

was one of a handful of Jewish strongmen that traveled the hundreds of shtetls in pre war Poland to show off their strenght.

One like him I saw in my childhood in Shershev it was Gustav (Gershon) Breidbord, the youngest brother of the most reknown strongmen in Poland in the twenties Zygmut (Zusie) Breidbord.

A couple years before the start of the war came to Pruzany such a strong man. His name was Jakob Kozeltzyk (Kozelczyk). There was talk that he hailed from the nearby shtetl "Krynek" (Krynky). I did not see his performance but I remember the talk that was going on about his strength many months after.

Apparently, he impressed the Nazis too with his physical strength for upon his arrival in Auschwitz, they appointed him to work in the bunker.

It was in late June or beginning of July 1943 as we stayed block by block in front of the kitchen to receive our extra half a loaf of bread and sausage, I noticed at a distance two men approaching in our direction. They had to pass by us as we were blocking their way. One of them was the tall red head SS man in charge of the bunker. The other was dressed in camp atire but hefty built and taller than the SS man. I am yet to see in Auschwitz a tall and well built and well fed prisoner. As they got closer my astonishment became greater for I noticed by his triangle that he was a Jew.

As they pass us, the big inmate puts out his hand in which he carried a whole loaf of bread and two pieces of sausage. Handing it to me, he said; "Here, have it and share it with your comrades." It took me several seconds to realize what happened. A total stranger just handed me a whole bread. From great excitement, I cut it into four pieces and gave three quarters of the loaf to three nearby inmates. After I had done it, the other inmates around poked fun at me saying, "You fool. You had a whole bread in your hands and gave it away." Other inmates around asked me if I knew that man. Receiving a negative answer, they told me that it was Jacob Kozelczyk. I found out that summer that from time to time that Jacob Kozelczyk entertains the SS and even the prominent inmates of the camp by showing off his extraordinary strength. In fact I heard it from the big shots in my stube when they used to come back from his performance which they were permitted to attend. How they marveled and admired his strength.

That summer the camp management organized a few Sunday afternoon entertainment for the entire camp. The main organizers were the block altesters and capos. This was the contradiction or ambiguity of Auschwitz. For those big shots it was the best place to spend the war year while for others, there was not even a place for burial, so they were burned and their

ashes were being thrown into the vistula or scattered over the surrounding fields.

They used to erect a temporary arena on the Appell Platz where wrestling or boxing competitions used to take place. Of course the participants were not Jews. For, what Jew had enough energy to waste? I recall a clown act performed by two German inmates. They were both professional entertainers and at the same time professional criminals. They must have been good in both professions. For their performances were excellent, still they were lifers.

In time a loose circle was created among the inmates from ghetto Pruzany that worked in our halley. During the noon break when we used to receive our soup we used to go down in the cellar of the halley which was never used except for "under the counter" dealings conducted by the privileged inmates. Like the inmate from Grodno that was by trade a shoe maker, yet he worked as a carpenter. True, there were others that were not carpenters including myself, but that man, Margolis, was kept in that factory as a shoe maker in stead of a carpenter to sit in that cellar and on the quiet make and repair shoes for the convenience of those big shots who preferred to wear made to measure shoes instead of the ones available in camp for the inmates.

That shoe maker, Margolis was especially busy that spring and summer making sandals for those influentials. Because of it, I got myself into trouble and could have lost my "distinguished" job as a shoe polisher and laundry man. Not to mention being kicked out to the Holtz-Platz.

It happened on a July day when we were coming back from work and under my jacket I was carrying a pair of sandals made by Margolis, for the capo or his assistants. As we approached the gate, we were stopped because other commandos (working groups) were ahead of us that were held back at the gate. A rumor spread in our ranks that a very strict search is taking place and the other groups are waiting their next to be let in and searched

I knew that a real thorough search would not pass without detecting a pair of leather sandals under my jacket. I did not want to throw them away and did not dare to keep it on me. As we were still a distance from the gate and in between the rows of the pig stys that looked more like stables, where they raised pigs for the SS and there were plenty of heaps of garbage, building material, tools, and other stuff, I stuck it into a pile of garbage. I knew that the inmates working there are on the way to camp or inside already and that tomorrow morning we will pass that place before they will be there.

Some five minutes later we resumed our mach into the camp. Past the gate and were dismissed to fall in for the appell. Apparently somebody higher up was satisfied with a partial search. As soon as I entered the stube, I told

Zygmund what I have done and assured him that it is in a safe place and be able to retrieve it tomorrow. I could easily see the resentment in his face. As if in spite, we had bread soup that evening, but theirs I did not get.

The next morning as we marched out to work and passing by the place where I had hidden the sandals, I run out the column, grabbing the sandals, I stuck them under the belt. I brought them back to Zygmund in the office.

Within a couple of days, thanks to the intervention of Leon Kulowski, we made up and things returned to the way they were.

By the way, I will mention that the shoe maker, Margolis, a man of about forty, tried to live by the rules of the Jewish dietary law to the extent that he would not eat the piece of sausage that we used to get twice a week, but exchanged it for bread. He went further than this. If once in a blue moon he used to find a grain sized piece of meat in his soup, he used to throw it out. For the reader's curiosity, I will say that in a boiler in which a thousand liters of soup used to be cooked, one kilogram of ground meat was added.

As that cellar was used only by that shoe maker, we, the group from ghetto Pruzany used to gather there during the midday break which lasted an hour, discussing politics. Quite often listening to a young man from Gaynuvka, by the name of Diesatnik, also from our ghetto, who had a pleasant voice singing Russian sentimental songs, of which he had a large repertoire. Whoever is familiar with the wealth of old Russian folk songs will understand what I mean.

Sometime in July 1943, the camp administration decided to rid the camp of the plague of fleas. Block by block after the evening appell, we were led to the bath house leaving our clothes and underwear in the stubes. While we were being disinfected and showered in the bath house, special disinfection commandos (groups) used to seal the block hermetically and afumigate it. Returning from the bath house, we had to stay outside in the nude for hours while the building was being aired to make it safe for us to come in.

After a couple treatments we finally got rid of the fleas.

In one of those summer Sundays, I happened to meet Shloime Pasmanik, a friend of my uncle Eli. He told me that several months earlier he was sent to an affiliated camp "Shventochlovitz" where he worked in the coal mines. He took sick and was sent back to Auschwitz into the Krankenbau (camp hospital). Fortunately he got better after a couple of days and was discharged, thus avoiding the SS doctors weekly selection in the hospital where as a rule the sick were taken to Birkenau gas chambers. That was the

only time I saw him in Auschwitz and it seems that nobody of our towns people that survived knows where and how he perished.

In places where capos could not stand with sticks over the inmates-trades-men in their charge like in our factory, the camp administration thought of another incentive to make trades-men produce more. They came up with awarding the inmates camp marks for those that produced more. A certain amount of marks was given to each capo to distribute them amongs his men as he sees fit. It was entirely up to the capo's discretion.

For those camp marks, one could buy when available a few cigarettes, half a liter sour kraut or half a liter snails marinated in mustard. Those two above mentioned food items had no value, for what good is half a liter mustard with a few snails in it when the stomach is crying out for a piece of bread or potatoes. The only good item were cigarettes. It could be exchanged for a piece of bread or a few potatoes. As soon as it became known in camp that there are cigarettes availible in the canteen, those that had marks went to buy them.

The canteen like the parcel post, the slaughter house and other good camp positions, were taken up by Polish inmates and a member of another nationality had no chance of working there, even German inmates could not get in there.

That evening the place was mobbed. I finally make my way through the mob, get to the counter and hand my five marks to a young ambitious server. The young man glances at me and sees a Jew. "You are here for the second time tonight." He yelled at me. He runs out from behind the counter grabbing me by my lapels, he starts shaking me and yelling, "You are here for the second time this evening. Admit it."

Scared and confused, not knowing what is gong on nor what crime I have committed, I answer "No. I have not been here before." Within a blink of an eye, there are half a dozen Polish workers around me while my accuser now holding me with one hand keeps on sticking his index finger of his second hand in my chest yelling "I caught him. He is here the second time this evening." One of them positions himself opposite me and asks me "Is it true?" I answer with a desperate "No, it is not true." He gives me a punch in the face and I notice that the ceiling is going in circles while the floor seems to come towards me. I notice suddenly that I am lying on the floor surrounded by the same group of Poles. They look at each other as if deciding what to do with me further. From somewhere appeared another Pole, of medium height and age, slender in build, dressed in a nice inmates uniform with a very distinguished and aristocrat face. "What is happening

here?" he asks. Before anyone of them had a chance to say anything, he continued. "You do not do those things." One of them protests; but he is here for the second time this evening. The man answered with the same calm voice. "You do not act like this. Let him go." He turns around and walks away.

The others disperse too. But that young Pole who originally accused me of having been there before takes his revenge. He still has in his hand my five marks. He walks over to the counter and stamps them. I read the stamped marks. It says "Not valid for cigarettes."

I leave the canteen hurt for being falsely accused and what is more deprived of the few cigarettes that could have fetched me a piece of bread but thankful to G-D for sending that nice Pole in time.

Sometime in August, our capo somehow arranged to send a group of carpenters from our halley to the women's Krankenbau (hospital) in Birkenau. At that time we did not understand the reason for it. True the women's Krankenbau barracks needed repairs, but it was not so urgent to have to send carpenters from D.A.W. There were other carpenter commandos in Auschwitz smaller and less specialized that could do the job. Besides there were carpentres in Birkenau proper who could do the job. It was obvious that it was in our capos interest to send men from D.A.W. especially from our halley.

He never failed to send along Hershl Morawsky. His best craftsman and confidence along with a few other good carpenters and their assistants who were being changed every few days. A few times I was sent there as an assistant carpenter.

On one of my "outings" there I watched the treatment of a group of women prisoners that where being supervised by a woman capo who tried to find favor in the eyes of the SS around. The group numbered some thirty women who were harnessed to a huge roller two meters high as it was lying on the ground and four meters long.

It was steered by a large wagon shaft which the poor unfortunate women were pulling over a piece of road covered with crushed stones. They kept on pulling it back and forth. The women capo with a green triangle identifying herself as a professional criminal and prostitute kept on beating them at the same time heaping at them all kinds of abusive names, curses, swears that even the SS men could have taken lessons from her.

When they stopped at noon, they got their soup and I moved closer. To my surprise, I recognized among them a girl from Shershev by the name of Feigl

K. She told me that it is a penal group in which she was sent for some camp transgression.

Surprisingly this girl survived Auschwitz, one of the half a dozen Shershev girls. Her hard life in their poor home before the war has conditioned her to the rigor and harshness of camp.

Between the work in the halley and some outside work, the summer of 1943 came to an end. In a sunny early fall day, I was again in the hospital section of the women's camp in Birkenau. As we worked independently without supervision of the SS men or foreman, whenever there were no SS men or local capos around, some of us used to leave work to wander around the women's hospital barracks in the hope of finding something to eat. For me that dream never materialized.

As I passed a row of barracks, I notice that in front of three of them with wide open doors, stands a well fed woman with a stick in her hand. Each of the three women has the unmistakable green triangle of the German prostitute-criminal. I deliberately walk by slowly and look in. But because of the bright sun, I see nothing. It seems to me as if someone deliberately has darkened the windows running along the top skylights on both sides of the roof top. I walk by again and look in with more intensity but still see nothing.

That there is something inside prohibitive I am sure. Possibly food? Maybe. One overseers notices my curiosity and says; "You can go in." I stop perplexed. If one is permitted to go in why is she guarding it? What has she in mind? She can hit me anytime. She needs no excuse. Yet she does not look threatening and says again. "Go, go in. I will not hit you." I walk through the gatelike door. It takes me several seconds to get used to the darkness but slowly start to appear before me a picture that takes away the rest of my breath that the smell did not as I came in. I manage to make out the familiar three tier Birkenau bunks. Slowly I begin to see spread out on the bunks naked bodies. Some motionless, some half sitting, some sitting. The sitting ones move very slowly with no purpose. What are they? I think to myself. They must be human but not of this world. Around them or on them are leaning others, some leaning against each other. Some are squatting, some are quiet others gesticulate strangely. Some sit on the edges of the bunks immobile as if frozen. The narrow space between the bunks is crowded with the same creatures who barely seem too move. Even the long flue running all the length of the barrack is covered with bodies. They sit, toppled over. Others are trying to sit them down again but have no strength to lift them and they remain on the barrack's muddy earthen floor.

At first glance, I take those creatures to be men for their upper parts of the bodies gave no indication of anything else but I soon realize that those were once women.

I was used to having seen men "muselmaner" but could never imagine what women "muselmaner" might look like. How can one imagine. We were in Birkenau in such a barrack three hundred men. Here I was looking at the same size barrack that held at least twice as many women condemned to death. How long they were there I could not tell nor did I ask. They were kept without food or water most of them already in delirium waiting for the SS to take them to the gas chamber. Everything seemed unreal as if I would be looking at an old faded slow moving film. One small creature reminiscing a skeleton, no more than three meters from me, started to mutter to me incoherently and tried to drag herself closer. As soon as she freed herself from the mass of wretched souls around her, she started to shuffle towards me. Now I could see her fully and jumped back as I noticed part of her innards were hanging and reaching to the ground from between what was supposed to be her legs now finger thin bones covered with gray skin. The sight was so frightening that I ran out of the barrack.

At that time I was long enough in Auschwitz-Birkenau to have seen many unbelievable things there, but the picture or scene I have just seen surpassed the most horrible thing I have ever seen in my life. It was everything; frightening, terrible, revolting, heart rending and incomprehensible. It was something from another world that comes only in a nightmare.

In the late afternoon when we got together to return to the D.A.W. factory, we were told by a couple of our men that dared venture deeper into the camp, that a very intense and concentrated selection took place in both men's and women's camps in Birkenau. The result or part of the women's selection I had seen an hour earlier.

The return trip to the factory passed without anybody uttering a word. We were all thinking about the selection conducted in Birkenau and about the thousands of young lives that were picked out to be taken to the gas chambers after months of slave labor, torture, and pain, trying to survive in inhumane conditions with the misleading hope that maybe , maybe ...

After returning to camp as soon as the appell was over, we Jews were lined up for a selection which was as far as I know, the most intense and severe in the camp for my time and apparently the history of the camp.

The next morning I found out that it is Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). The Nazis, may they fry in hell, knew how to make our Holy Days, and Days of Awe unforgettable.

Although newspapers or radios were not permitted into the camp, still a trickle of news used to filter through from time to time. I do not know how but a piece of a page from a German newspaper suddenly appeared in our stube and started to circulate from one to another. Everyone was eager to read it. I too.

On that small piece of paper, no more than a dozen lines, I read: "In the last few days, the Soviet command has awarded ten thousand Jewish generals and officers of the Red Army medals for bravery. Let the German people and army take note of it and keep it well in mind to make sure that no Soviet soldier ever sets foot on German soil."

For us Jews in our stube, there could not have been any better news except the news of liberation, but I noticed that the Poles in our stube were not at all happy with the news. In fact, they tried to belittle it by saying that there are not as many Jewish officers in the Red Army, or that the Germans deliberately wrote it in order to motivate and add incentive for their soldiers to fight harder.

A couple weeks later on a Sunday afternoon, a rumor spread in camp that in an hour or two all Jews of Auschwitz #1 will be taken to Birkenau meaning to the gas chambers.

If there ever were Jewish inmates in Auschwitz-Birkenau that mentioned the word surviving the war, it was no more than wishful thinking that will never be realized. We knew only too well that the Germans can not and will not let live any witnesses to the horrible crime and mass murder they are commiting here.

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Chapter 12

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Knowing that the Germans are retreating on the Eastern Front, the rumor of us Jews being taken to the gas chambers sounded logical and believable. My Capo Janek sitting on his bunk almost opposite me, thus making me the nearest Jew to him at that moment said; "Juz Najwyzszy czas" (It is high time.)

His expression grieved me deeply for I did not expect to hear it from him. After all, eighty percent of his workers were Jews who craftsmanship and amount of work made him the most influential capo in D.A.W. Secondly he said it to me, the one who risked his life so many times by bringing things in the camp for his comfort and well being and for which his attendant use to pay me up with a bit of soup now and then.

It is very difficult to describe the feelings and thoughts that went through my head. The vexation, the grief for having to spend 8-9 months in this hell of Auschwitz and to have to have to die now that my situation is just beginning to stabilize.

The time ticked by in anguish terribly fast, with a cry to God he should stop the time forever. In despair I forgot that I have hidden in my straw sack a ration (a quarter) of bread which I kept in reserve. I quickly got it out and ate it up not having a reason to save it any longer.

So we sat on our bunks waiting for the announcement to line up in front of the block to be led to Birkenau.

The afternoon became evening, it is quiet in the stube as well as in the entire camp. We figure that the Nazis are waiting for night to commit their grisly work. It is nine o'clock and the gong sounds signaling "lights out". We get onto our bunks and wait for the lights to go on and the blockaltesters announcement for us to get out. I try to imagine how they will lead us, will they let us get dressed or will we be forced to march the three kilometres from Auschwitz to Birkenau naked in the September night. We know in fact that no inmate nor anyone else has been gassed while dressed, all victims were first made to undress.

Eventually the exhaustion of the weeks work and the tension of that day takes over. Before we know the gong is ringing, it is four-thirty in the morning, every one is rushing to straiten the bunk, get washed, stay in line for the piece of bread and fear of surviving the new day.

About a month later as the denizens of our stube are getting ready to settle in for the night, one of the Forman, a prominent inmate who slept in the place where the other big shots slept, said out aloud; I feel terrible, I don't know what is happening to me. All those around him looked at him inquisitively and indeed the twenty five year old pole with the nickname "Cygan" (Gypsy, in Polish) who a couple of months expressed aloud his incomprehension over the fact that the Jews in our stube let themselves be pushed around and beaten up by the stubendienst Kazik. Such a remark was a direct challenge to the authority of a stubendienst especially when it was said by a pole to another in front of a stube (room) full of Jews, which infuriated even more the stuben Dienst. What's more, such a remark could be equated or inferred as a call to resistance in a place where thousands were put to death daily.

The law of Auschwitz and other concentration camps too was that a Stuben Dienst is the sole authority in the stube which can only be overruled by the blockaltester who as a rule was more of a sadist and murderer than the Stuben Dienst.

The Stuben Dienst controlled himself knowing that the forman has a few friends nearly among them the Capo Janek, a man with authority. To take them all on could end with his down fall, so the stuben Dienst took another approach; Do you want to tell me that you would dare hit me back, he said to Cygan, look at you and look at me continued, the Stuben Dienst Kazik and indeed he was right, for although they were both the same average height, Cygan was a slim young man while the Stuben Dienst Kazik weight at least a hundred kilogram of which a good part of it was muscle. It marks no difference, replied Cygan, if even I knew that you would break every bone in my body I would still hit you back.

Here the Stuben Dienst realized that the other refused a honorable withdrawal from the argument so he accepted the challenge answering with a provocative; Do you want to show me what you would do to me? Here the Big-Shot Polesintervened and with the Capo in charge they made peace between the two.

This then Cygan who dared to stand up to the former Cygan looked now very sick. His face swarthy for a Pole was now dark gray and Distorted. One did not have to be a doctor to know that the man was sick. His friend wanted to take him right away to the "Krankenbau" (camp hospital) but he insisted on remaining in the stube overnight. Why? I didn't and still don't know even until this day. Poles were not being taken from there to the gas chambers. The gas chambers were an "exclusive privilege" for Jews. With

his connections he would have received there, in the hospital, the best medical attention that Auschwitz had to offer.

Still, next morning he remained in the stube when we went out to the appeal and to work. When we came back after work his bunk was empty.

The following evening after returning to camp and after the appeal, we were ordered to go to our stube. The blockaltester (Block Senior) announced that as there was Typhus found in stube number four (my stube). The Stube is being quarantined. We were to remain on the stube until further notice. We are to use the toilets only while the others in the Block are at work. For emergency use a large barrel was put in the less honorable part of the stube as far from the place of honor where the big shot slept as possible. That is in the one hundred percent Jewish section of the stube.

Nobody was allowed outside the stube. Our bread and the Auschwitz tea was brought for us to the door as well as the soup at noon. It was after the deliverers left that we use to open the door to take it in.

At the start it felt like a holiday for us, especially for the Jews who use to work hard the twelve hours a day on a nagging hungry stomach. Now imagine in Auschwitz to sit all day long undisturbed, rather lie stretched out on the bunk and sleep to your hearts content. To get up just to receive the piece of bread in the morning and your soup at noon.

The first couple of days I was very hungry, as we did not get the extra half of bread or the bread soup twice a week at night. But after four-five days we all lost our appetite. I was able to satisfy my hunger with half the piece of bread in the morning, the other half I use to hide in my straw sack.

The reason for the lack of appetite I would attribute to two reasons. Firstly we were confined to a very small place, that is to lying on the bunk almost motionless. The lack of motion, the confinement with hundred others in close quarters with doors and windows closed and a large wooden barrel that is being constantly use as a toilet that filled up the room with an unbearable smell was enough to make everybody sick. This compounded with the rumor that began circulating in the stube that the Germans are planning to transfer us to Birkenau, (read Gas Chambers) was enough to take our appetite away.

It is interesting to mention that the rumor about Birkenau was taken very seriously by us Jews, the Poles shrugged it off refusing to believe that Poles will be taken to the Gas Chambers.

To be locked up twenty four hours a day with a hundred people one can't help but overhear all sorts of conversations. I, having my bunk close to the big-shots had a good spot to be able to listen to their conversations. I

found out that the "Cygan" contracted his typhus from a girl in Birkenau women's camp.

The Birkenau camp was terribly filthy, full of lice and other vermin. It was never fully eradicated of typhus. Listening to their escapades maybe some-what exaggerated or boastful. One could get really in the hell of Auschwitz which was for us Jews, but in a country house where all their thoughts were directed towards women.

One of the thing which became clear to me as I was listening to their conversations was that their reasons for our overseers eagerness to find for us work in binkenaus women's camp were the women and we carpenters served as their access.

It was sad to listen to the boasting of some of them as they were bragging how they could buy the favor of any Jewish girl for a portion of bread. Poor unfortunate Jewish children, innocent, untouched by men, were brought to that place inviolate. But here degraded to a situation that forced them to sell their innocents and dignity for a piece of bread. All this did not save them from loosing their young and tormented lives in the Gas Chambers of Birkenau.

We remained quarantined for two weeks. At the end of the two weeks we were taken to the bath-house disinfected shovered and on return to the stube received clean underwear. The next morning we went to work.

I have never really spoken to a S.S. man except the usual "Ya-vol" (Yes Sir) to an order which usually sounded more like a bark that a human voice and most of the time accompanied with a blow from a stick or a kick with a boot.

That summer of 1943, sometimes in August I heard a S.S. man speaking with a human voice. It happened when the Capo had to send some carpenters to a S.S. officers house to do some repairs. The house was in the town of Auschwitz proper, a distance of 3-4 kilometres from camp. As usual, along with the carpenters went a couple assistants. I was one of them.

During the day the terrain around Auschwitz-Birkenau, a perimetre of several kilometres in which the inmates worked, was surrounded with a chain of watch towers, menned by S.S. men with machine-guns. The towers were close enough that there was no chance to break through. There were however a couple roads that led from the enclosure to the town and other directions. Those roads were being guarded by the S.S. men and anybody who was going in or out the chain of watch towers had to have a permit, like the few civilians who supervise some work there. Even the S.S. that were accompanying prisoners had to have permission.

Three S.S. men were assigned to accompany us eight men from the moment we left the enclosure until we entered it.

In the morning after coming to the factory and getting our tools together took an hour. We set out on our own to the end of the guarded perimetre where the three S.S. men were waiting for us They led us to the S.S. officers house. There were a couple of other groups of prisoners who were cleaning the yard and landscaping it. Another group was repairing the fence and still another was putting down hard-wood floors in the house. Each group came with their own few S.S. men. There were over a dozen of them, why so many to guard us? Apparently they realized it too, so they came to some understanding and soon half of them disappeared, taking a holiday.

Those inmates that were working outside the D.A.W. factory and could not be back at noon for their soup, their soup use to be kept until they returned to the factory at five in the afternoon. Thus we had to work the entire day until five o'clock on the portion of bread that we got five in the morning.

One of our three S.S. guards was a man of about forty, not young for an ordinary S.S. man. We took the chance to approach him to ask if he would escort us to the guard chain from where we would walk to the factory, receive our soup, and come back to the same spot where he left us off. From there he would escort us back to the city.

What we did not tell him was that by doing it we planned to get an extra liter soup, by apriving during the soup distribution we would just line up with the others and get our liter of soup. Afterwards we would just as quietly sneak out and nobody would be the smarter. Upon returning at five to the factory we would get the put aside for us soup as if we were not there at noon.

The S.S. man, after a short conversation with the other two of our guards agreed.

At eleven thirty we tell him that it is time to go, as the distribution of soup starts at twelve and it would take us half an hour to get there. To our surprise he tells us to start going and he follows while the other two stay behind in the officers house.

We can't believe what is happening. He is breaking all rules. We are eight men and the regulations call for three guards to go with us. Secondly, their orders are to keep us all day. But who are we to argue. We start going, not like in a drill but as a group, and he goes behind. When we distanced ourselves from the city and there was nobody around, for no reason whatever

and to nobody in particular the S.S. man said; "One dog is dead, now it is time for the other".

We knew what he meant but didn't dare to say anything. We didn't even dare to turn our heads to look at him. A day earlier a rumor spread that Benito Mussolini has been arrested by the freshly formed provisional Italian Government. I think to myself; Does he want to provoke us or is it possible that he realized that the war is lost and wants to repent. Still we were glad to hear such words coming out of a S.S. men's mouth, even not knowing if they are traitorous or sincere. Now in retrospect I believe that they were sincere.

He brought us to the guard line repeating a couple of times that we should be back at one o'clock dead or alive.

We worked at and around the S.S. officers house for a couple of week, yet we never saw the officer at home. His wife however, a young good looking blond with a one year old baby was constantly at home. They had what one would call a maid. She was a middle aged women, an inmate like ourselves with a violet tri-angle that classified her as a "Internationale Bible Forsher Vereinigung" that is Jehova witness. Those people were all Germans whose males refused to serve in the army, work in any ammunition factory or in any way contribute to the war effort. All that Hitler demanded of them was to renounce their conviction which meant their faith, which they categorically refused and preferred to spend their time in a concentration camp. To be candid I would say that those in camp had it better than many soldiers on the Russian Front and for sure securer with their survival. As a group they were treated better than any other and were given good positions.

That women inmate conducted herself in the S.S. man's house as if a member of the family, looking after their baby and eating with them. In fact, she gave me an apple. That was the only fruit I have tasted from the moment the Germans entered Shershev until my Liberation, a total of four years.

During the couple of weeks that we worked there, there were times that other wives of S.S. officers use to come on a visit. They were all about the same age, well dressed, some with a small child. Because of the work going on and banging in the adjoining rooms, they were compelled to speak louder or raise their voices from time to time.

The bit of Germans that I know comes from Yiddish which derives mainly from German and the German that I learned in the Ghetto and camps consist mainly of name calling, cusswords, abusive words, invective, swearing, degradation words, and curses. Although I did not pay particular attention to their conversation, I came to the conclusion that there is also a nicer German that the one I am exposed to from before sunrise to night.

In late October when the days got much shorter, the commandos (work groups) that work outdoors began to return to the camp at sunset. The important commandos like our D.A.W. remained on the job until six o'clock. With sunset extra S.S. use to surround the factory and at six they use to escort us to camp.

The irony of it was that we Jews preferred this way. As selections that took place in winter were conducted outdoors right after the appeal when the Jewish inmates had to undress and stay naked until the selection was over, while for us that worked later the selection was conducted in the bath house. During one such selection in the bath house I slipped on the wet boards of the huge room. Fortunately Dr. Mengele was at the same time conducting a conversation with another S.S. officer and had his eye averted for a second. That gave me time to jump up and continue to pass by him.

And so in anguish, hunger, despair, and helplessness arrived the middle of December, 1943. The Poles in our stube are becoming a little sentimental. They talk among themselves about the pre war Christmases. Wondering what is going on now in their homes, what preparations are taking place. To us Jews it seems so trivial, so insignificant in comparison to our calamity. They are sorry for being unable to be home with family to celebrates Christmas, for the loss of a couple years of freedom. We all knew that Germany is losing the was and that they, the Poles, will be free and return home where their entire families are waiting for them. We Jews came here with our extended families and saw them going up in smoke and flame. We also knew that in the last moment before the was will end, the Germans will kill the last Jews in their hands.

Christmas eve the Poles had a feast in the stube. The big-shots took up their places around the table which was extended to make room for more Poles. The others took up places on the surrounding bunks. Each of them contributed some goodies from their parcels that they all received from home. We Jews set on our bunks looking as they ate to their fill while our mouths watered.

The Poles asked Leon Kulowski to address the group as he was the most suitable in such a situation. It was no easy task to address imprisoned Poles in a concentration camp and not to overstep the line. He knew that he was walking on thin ice but he made some sort of speech.

It snowed that night. We did not go to work on Christmas day, but the next day we did. As we marched out that morning to work, the surrounding, as far as we could see, was covered with a pure white blanket of snow that hid for a moment the purgatory beneath it.

An hour later the whole terrain was trampled by the human caricatures that turned it back to its original hell.

In those conditions I lost count of the days, weeks, and even months. I didn't even know when the month of January 1944 came and went and here it was February 1944 which marked a year since my arrival in Auschwitz.

In mid February, a fair size group of workers from our hall started to work near Birkenau at building barracks for the "Luftwaffe" (German Air Force). Our work consisted of installing windows and doors. The barracks were in the middle of an empty space, a kilometre from the nearest building which were the barracks of Birkenau. Because of the cold the work progressed slowly. The putting up with the bitter cold in and outside the windowless and doorless barracks. Ten hours a day on empty stomachs, plus the hour march each way to and from that work place. To the factory dressed in our camp garb was unbearable. We could hardly hold our spoons .When on return to the factory, we use to get our allotted soup that we were suppose to get at midday.

By mid March this part of the job was finished and we started to build individual outhouse for the expected air man. Because of the shortage of material on the spot the Capo decided to build them in the factory, in our alley. Every morning S.S. truck use to come to the factory. Eight or ten of us use to haul a couple of out-hauses on the truck. Then our group use to get on, plus a couple S.S. men, and we use to proceed to the Auschwitz guard chain and form there in the Birkenau one. There the S.S. use to leave us alone and come back at five to take us back to the factory.

During my time in Auschwitz there were a few attempts by prisoners to escape. It was done by Poles, for Jews escape was senseless, for if even he would succeed in getting out, which was in any case doubtful, where would he run? The very first Pole would betray him and if not the first there were many others.

However Poles could run. They had families, friends, and acquaintances where they could hide. Still some of the few that managed to get out were caught and were on display dead at the gate of the camp. Others were hung in public on the appeal ground for all us to see.

Still I felt that I must at least think about escape if not to try, for when I'll be led into the gas chambers, of which I had no doubt, I should have no regrets for not having tried to save myself.

To be honest I approached the whole idea half hartedly, remembering my experience with my attempt to get out of the Ghetto. I reasoned that if I

could not and did not get out of the ghetto my chances of getting out of Auschwitz are none existent. Never the less I planed.

My plan was as follows; Since our group travels daily by a S.S. truck hauling out houses to Birkenau, our S.S. escort has so far never checked the inside of one, not while putting it on the truck, not while leaving the Auschwitz guarded perimetre, nor on entering the Birkenau perimetre. Our plan was to enter an out house. Nobody should know, to pass both the Auschwitz and Birkenau guard perimetre. Once inside the Birkenau perimetre the guards used to leave us alone. I would come out and hide in one of the many empty barracks. When it would be discovered that I m missing, the search would take place in the Auschwitz guard perimetre for nobody would know that I ever got out of Auschwitz and got into the Birkenau perimetre. Once after two or three days they would not find me, the guard around the perimetre would be taken off during the night as usual for night time. All inmates were in the camp proper, I would make my escape.

The plan had some merit and to me seemed achievable in theory, but my co-workers had to know about it as they were the ones that used to put the off houses on and off the truck. As soon as I told them my plan, they turned on me with accusations and charges of wanting to kill them. You know, they claimed, that once it will become known that we helped out in escape, or even knew about it, we are doomed, they'll hang us all.

With it, my plan of escaping from Auschwitz ended.

After this event, I stopped going with that group to Birkenau and remained working in the halley, where I would have rather been working anyway. Twelve working hours outdoors and the wait for the soup until six o'clock did not appeal to me.

That winter, that is 1943-1944, all outside the camp working groups used to return to camp with dark. As far as I know, only our Commando D.A.W. worked until six and as soon as we use to leave work, the night shift use to take over. There was talk that our working later spared us from having to go through a couple selections. Apparently the "Angel of Death" , Dr. Mengele, did not want to wait or waste his time on conducting a selection on a few hundred Jews when he had in front of him thousands.

Although the S.S. tried to keep us in total isolation from the world, some news used to filter through and we knew that the Germans are falling back on the Eastern Front. Exactly where the front was at a given time we didn't know. It was up to anyone's imagination and prayer. However, the good news from front did not spell good news for us Jewish inmates, for we knew that the Nazis would not let any Jew survive the war. We also knew

that the red army is getting closer to us and with it, so is our end. Yet our desire to even know that Germany is losing the war was greater that the realization that we will not see it and reuse to rejoice will every German lose on the front.

In the middle of an early spring night in 1944, we were awakened of the wail of the camp siren. Usually the wail of the siren was a signal to alert the S.S. to the fact that an escape had been made, or attempted to make. But this use to happen during day time hours, while the inmates were outside the camp and within the guards perimetre. It never happened at night, for there was no escape from within the camp. The entire camp was one large slab of asphalt surrounded by two rows of electrified barbwires around which was a tall solid cement wall. All this was brightly lit and surrounded with many guard towers mend by S.S. men with machine-guns.

Only in the morning did we find out that it was an air-raid, the first in the history of Auschwitz. There was no damage to be seen, in fact we didn't even here a single explosion. One thought was on the minds of the Jewish inmates, namely; how lucky we would be to die from an allied bomb instead of having to be driven by the accursed S.S. into the gas chambers.

In early April 1944, the snow was gone and the sun soon dried the large partly paved square between the main factory building and the subsidiary allies of the D.A.W. One morning as we came to work we noticed part of that square is taken up with large wooden crates that have been brought during the night.

During the midday break when we were getting our soup, I noticed some inmates standing very close to those crates and looking inquisitively and intensely at them. As I walked over, one of the inmates pointed out to me a certain spot, a board of a crate. I see writing and begin to read. It is written with a pencil, partly a letter, partly a will and testament. Above all, it is a prayer to any one who will read it. I look at the hastily written Jewish letter and read; "Let it be known that the Jews from that given camp worked with these crated machines, up to now their last assignment is to crate these machines which will be their last task in their lives, for right after the crating is done they will be taken to the open pits that are already waiting for them outside the camp".

Their plea was that maybe somewhere in a camp a Jew will read it and by some miracle survive, he should tell that in that given place was a camp that was liquidated on such and such a date and it's inmates were put to death.

We started looking for more messages and found many. Some were only names, others just short messages asking to pass on to anybody. Others, quite lengthy messages. But all without exception contained a farewell word to the reader, and to life itself.

How many thoughts and what kind came into my mind I would not try to enumerate. But I remember thinking as to how long it will be before we will be writing such messages and wondering if there was still be a Jew in the Nazi domain left to read it. Judging by the countless trainload of Jews coming daily to Auschwitz and being sent strait to the gas chambers, I doubted if not only those that wrote on the crate but even legacy will ever be told.

Now, well over half a century later, I realize that it was a mistake not to try to remember the name of that camp and it's history. But then again, who would think that he would live to write about it.

A couple weeks later, to be precise on the fourth of may 1944 in the morning before we were even driven out of the stube to the appeal, in comes the block-schrrieber and reads out two numbers, mine and another man's. He tells us that today we are not going to work and that right after the appeal we should return to the stube.

Every inmate dreaded to hear his name being called out, it always bore bad news. I knew, however, that I didn't do anything wrong, so I came to the conclusion that it is concerning a "transport". The word "transport" meant among other things to be sent to another camp, which was not welcomed news.

Even though Auschwitz was hell on earth, some inmates, those that were still alive, managed to find for themselves a kind of "niche" in the camp structure by which they succeeded to survive and stay alive for days, months, and even years. The trick was to be able to procure for oneself somewhat more to eat, just enough to sustain your emaciated body. Here again I am referring to Jewish inmates who had no outside help. The bottom line was the ability to get some extra food. The constant arrival of Jews from Nazi occupied and Nazi allied countries inadvertently contributed to the availability of more food than in other camps, even those affiliated with Auschwitz. For example the bread soup, which was only distributed in Auschwitz.

Some Jewish inmates, small in number, who were fortunate to work in the "Auhamungs Kommando", otherwise known as "Kanada", where despite the watchful eyes of the S.S. and constant threat of death for the slightest

transgression use to manage to get some valuables out and exchange it for food.

Such places of work or "positions" did not exist in other camps and the inmates had to make do with their allotted ration which could not sustain a working man for longer that three months.

No wonder than that nobody wanted to be sent on a so called transport to another camp.

As soon as all commandos (work groups) left the camp, the block-schrreiber (registrar) took the two of us from our stube, me and the other man who turned out to be the man from whom I use to buy the soap to wash my superiors laundry. His name was Leibl (Leon) Bliskowsky. A short man, eighteen years my senior, almost twice my age. He hails from the village of "Jalowka" near Bialystok. He married a dozen years earlier to Moishe-Mendl Gordon's daughter of Pruzany. Up to the war he lived in Jalowka where he and his father owned a flour mill. In 1939, when the Bolshevics came, they took their mill away, as they called it nationalized the mill. Deprived of a livelihood, Leibl, his wife, and child moved to his father in law in Pruzany. Two years later they shared the fate of the entire Ghetto Pruzany. They were brought to Auschwitz where his wife and nine year old daughter went straight to the gas chambers and now we were sharing an unknown future.

The registrar is leading us out of the block where the registrar from block "A" is waiting with one man. He is a tall well built man of close to fifty, but seems agile for his age. By his number on the jacket we can tell that he is from our Ghetto. He tells us that he is from Maltch (Malecz) and his name is Shmuel (Samuel).

We were led to the bath house, a preliminary to a "Transport". We are completely shaven, disinfected, given clean underwear, and a clean jacket and pants. We are a group of close to two hundred men. I hear Jewish, Polish, Russian, German, and Greek being spoken. Yet one prevalent language which I never heard before.

It is way past midday and there is no sign of soup and the stomach growls.

Finally two trucks arrive, there is no roof but the entire truck is covered with a tarpaulin. We climb in and are in total darkness, we don't know in which direction we are going.

After many hours of driving, we stop and get out. We stand on a small elevation. Before us we see a small camp consisting of half a dozen low barracks and a couple smaller buildings. All coloured green with black tarred roofs. The most unusual thing was the fence surrounding the camp. It was an

ordinary wooden fence that one puts around a garden, a fence that could not stop a nor a cat from getting in or out, never mind a man.

While at that moment my mind was not on escaping, yet the whole thing seemed bizarre.

We were divided in two groups and each group was led in the first two barracks. We found inside two tier single wooden bunks. In each bunk was a straw sack and two dark brown blankets. We were not permitted that evening to leave the barracks. But looking out the windows we realized that the Germans left nothing to chance. Ten metres outside the fence and twenty metres apart stood a line of S.S. men all around the enclosure. There were electric lights on the fence, not like on the Auschwitz fence but enough to light up the fence and the entire enclosure.

Next morning right after the appeal we were divided in work groups that were assigned and ready beforehand. Among the two hundred inmates were half a dozen Germans. One came as a "Lageraltester", (camp elder) a second as an "Arbaitsdienst", (General work supervisor) a third as the "Lager Capo", (camp Capo) and the others as "Blockaltesters" (block elders). From the dozen Poles that came with us, seven were cooks for us prisoners and a couple for the S.S. From the remaining three, one was the "Lager Schrreinber" (camp registrar). The other two were appointed Capos. The minority were sixteen Russians that were suppose to receive the same treatment as we Jews, but they had the additional job to carry into the camp the soup container, for which they received an extra litre of soup plus the privilege to empty or scrape the bottoms and the walls of the barrels.

Only we, the remaining hundred and fifty Jews were left to do the heavy labour. From among us Jews, the largest number consisted of newly arrived Italian Jews which were given the number one hundred and eighty thousand and up. Except for a couple of them that spoke German, we could not converse with each other. They came not knowing and uninformed about Jewish persecution and were completely bewildered and lost. The foreign language German, the yelling, the cursing, and the beatings confused them totally. They looked like a sorry lot.

The few remaining Jews were; we three from Ghetto Pruzany, one from Grodno, a couple from Silesia, and two to three each from central Poland, Germany, and France.

We were immediately told the reason of our being there and the purpose of our work. The present small and unguarded camp up to two days ago was occupied by six hundred French volunteer workers. They were ordered to vacate the camp and told to find accommodations in the nearby

city of Sosnowiec, three hundred metres away. Our task is to fence in the camp as required by concentration camp law. That is a double barbed wire fence through which as electric current flows. The wires have to be strung on regulation cement posts. After we will have fenced ourselves in, a large "Zugang" (shipment of prisoner) will arrive from Auschwitz and we will start working in the nearby ammunition factory.

Meantime, we started to build the fence. Here too, like in Auschwitz, we got up at four thirty in the morning. Right after the appeal, (reveille) we use to get a loaf of bread for three men. At midday we had the customary liter soup and at night a cup of camp tea. The loaf of bread we had to divide ourselves between the three of us. We three, that is I, Leibl Bliskowski, and Shmuel Rosenboim from our Ghetto, but originally from Maltch (Malecz), became partners. We had to share a loaf of bread, cutting it up in three even pieces, which wasn't an easy task.

How do you divide a loaf of bread and be satisfied that you nor your friend has been wronged, not by a bite of bread but even a crumb, for bread is treated more than life. So we use to cut the loaf as close to equal thirds as possible. If one piece looked somewhat larger or smaller that the others, we use to cut a piece from one and put it on the other. After each portion use to pass the scrutiny of each one of us and we all were satisfied that they are equal, one used to turn around so as not to see the bread behind him, a second use to point at one fortune and ask; Who is this portion for? He had to say for whom. Of course we had to take turns in turning around and in pointing out. In this way we made sure that nobody is wronged.

Here again we Jews returned to the strict camp ration. The big-shots, like the blockaltesters Capos who use to dish out the soup, use to take for themselves all they wanted, not to mention the cooks who use to cook for themselves all kinds of delicacies. Even the Russian prisoners who were working with us use to get the extra liter soup for bringing it out from the kitchen. For us Jews there was no opportunity nor chance for an extra spoonful of food.

The shape of the camp was rectangular. Facing the northern narrow side of the camp where the gate was and some twenty metres away was a long barrack-like building which contained the living quarters of the S.S., the living quarters of the camp commandant, his office consisting of one room and the kitchens.

By facing the S.S. barrack and kitchen one could see on the left a road running close to the camp fence that served as the approach to the camp and a kilometre further to the ammunition factory in which we were going to

work after we will be fenced in. Looking past the road to the left, some three hundred metres away, was the outskirts of the town of Sosnowiec.

On Sundays we could see the Polish inhabitants walking Leisurly at the edge of the city a couple hundred metres away. We could see their smiling faces, the warm embraces of young lives soon to be cut short.

Our first task was to walk to the factory where each of us took a bag of cement weighing fifty kilograms and carried it on his back to the camp. Exhausted and hungry, I felt that at any minute I will collapse under its weight, but this would spell my end, so I use to summon my last bit of strength and bring it to the camp. The only respite was walking back to the factory for another one.

Within a few days, one of the empty barracks was filled up with sacks of cement and we started out to the factory for iron wires, one centimetre in diameter and five metres long. Those wires, or rods, were needed for the skeletons of the cement posts for the camp fence. Those rods were tied in bundles and carried by two or three men. Carrying those bundles on our shoulders reminded me of the "Holtz-Plaz" (timber yard) in D.A.W., but I must admit that it was more Bearable without the murderous pilarek around.

We started making the cement posts. First was the heavy-wire skeleton put into the post frame and frame was filled with freshly mixed cement. We were divided into groups. Each group was assigned a certain task. One to make the wooden post frames, another to make the wire post skeletons. The cement was mixed in a mixer. One group use to bring the bags of cement from the barrack, another had to carry the send and some worked at the mixer. The Capos did not spare the stick but worse than they were the countless S.S. men that watched us day and night. Many of them young men straight out of the S.S. training of S.S. school with lots of ambition and vigor who would not leave us alone for a moment. But worse then them were the "Arbait-Dienst" (work supervisor). He was a German inmate in his mid twenties, handsome, and well built with a red (political internee) triangle. This in itself was unusual, as all German inmates with red triangles were middle age men. Young German inmates had green triangles which meant professional criminals. When he use to come to see how the work progresses, his behavior towards us made the S.S. men look like angels. We could not understand, for as I mentioned earlier all German red triangles were political prisoners and Hitless opponents, respectable people. How come that this young German with a red triangle is such a murderer?

Several days later this young German had a disagreement with the Lager-Altester (camp elder), and as a result the Lager-Altester has demoted

him to an ordinary forman over the send haulers in which I worked. There couldn't have been worst news for us. We began to wonder as to how long we can last under his supervision. To our surprise he tells us to put down the baskets and delivers a short speech. He tells us that our group will be the best group to work in. Most of the men in our group are Italian Jews. He asked one of them how to say "To stop". The answer comes "Fermatedi". And the word for "Forwards"?- "Avanti". He repeats the words a couple of times. We pick up the heavy baskets and walk. Twenty metres farther he yells "Fermatedi". We put the baskets down for a couple of minutes and hear "Avanti". We pick them up to stop again twenty metres further.

We are confused, not only we but the S.S. around us who walk away in disgust.

As if in spite he always makes us stop when the Lager-Altester passes by. What's worse, when the camp commandant passes by, the big and fat S.S. man who instills fear and trembling in us whenever he goes by.

As days go by, our forman starts to talk. We are finding out that he was a Gendarme indeed with the brown cuffs and collar assigned to the Krakow district. His work was with the department of supervision over the Krakow Ghetto. He use to tell his stories with visible longing for the days when he was dealing with the Ghetto, when he use to walk under and come out with a brief-case full of German marks.

How does one characterize a type like him that belonged to the Nazi police. The so called "Shutz Polizei" that was part of the "Einsatzgruppen". The very same that from the middle of 1941 to the fall of 1942 killed in cold blood a million and a half Jews, not sparing a single soul, from infant to old and infirm, throwing many half dead in mass graves, burying many still alive. To be at other times able to obtain by cunning of false promises and terror, the last mark from a Jew and eventually take his life. At the same time betray his leader (fuerrer) and his party to whom he swore allegiance, and when caught and sent to Auschwitz for punishment to turn into a murder and when it serves his purpose to act like an angel.

To our advise that he should not antagonize his superiors, he replied; Have no fear, I know the law better then they and I'm acting accordingly. What did we Jews know about laws, all we knew was that for us Jews the exit from there was via the crematorium chimney.

The end was that he was sent back to Auschwitz. Was it a punishment or they wanted to get rid of him, we never found out.

The barrack we have taken over were neglected and the rain use to come through the roof. A few of us were given the task of tarring over the roof, I was one of them.

We had to melt harder lumps of tar and spread it thickly over the roof. Although it was the month of may, to stand all day on the roof, exposed to the wind, was far from uncomfortable and caused us frequent trips down to urinate which was a new experience for us.

Another problem was to bet the tar off our hands which was impossible until we received a jug of sulfuric acid. After pouring a few drops in the palm of the hand and quickly rubbing it all over the hands, the tar use to start melting. We immediately had to stick are hands under running water. They use to become clean but very red and raw.

We finished that job in a week. By that time others started already to dig in the fence post.

It seemed that the Germans planned to enlarge this camp for they started to fence in a much larger area then the few barracks needed.

Some system was eventually organized while soon were still making the cement posts. Still others were bringing them over and laying them down near the holes while others were digging them in.

Once, the washer on which the drum of the cement mixer rested broke and had to be replaced. As the mixer was the most important piece of machinery, the camp commandant himself supervised to repair process. It was no easy task, it required to lift out the mixing drum, which was a metre and a quarter in diametre made of heavy sheet metal and thickly caked on with cement. It had a half metre long shaft protruding from the bottom of its center that fitted in a bearing. It took as many people as could get around the drum to lift it out, and lover it to the ground. The old washer was taken out and the camp commandant himself put the new washer in its place. Doing it, he said clearly, that nobody should touch it while we are lifting the drum to put it back in its place. If taking the drum down was difficult, the putting it back was much worse. Firstly, it now had to be lifted from the ground and the shaft had to go in the bearing without touching or moving the washer. After many tries, and super human exertion, we had the shaft right over the washer when one man suddenly stretches out his hand and touches the washer.

I don't know if it seemed to him that the washer needed adjustment or the devil himself made him do it. We could not hold the drum and dropped it to the ground.

It is impossible to describe the rage of the camp commandant and the sight of the three hundred pound S.S. man hitting and when he fell kicking the eighty pound Dutch Jews.

After that picture we didn't need encouragement to lift the drum and the cement mixer was soon operating again.

The digging on the posts progressed nicely, when the commandant noticed that they are not in a very straight line. He ordered them dug up and redo the jobs which again did not please him. More men were sent to do that job, including me. Having experience with digging posts yet from the Ghetto, I started lining up the posts. This time they remained in the ground.

Slowly the previous innocent little camp began to look like a concentration camp. The posts were all in and we started to string barb wire on them and attach powerful electric lights on each post that were five metres apart. They brought from Auschwitz two doctors both Hungarian Jews. They partitioned off of an empty barrack and converted it into a kankenbau (hospital) from an other barrack they partitioned, a small place and called it bekleidunges-kammer (clothes-room). They even sent in an inmate to run it, making him a Capo, a Jew from France by the name of Fuks. The S.S. sent in a truck load of underwear and from then on we used to change our underwear weekly. As far as going to shower, we could go any time, even daily.

Apparently the German-Polish alliance of the inmates that existed in our camp and run it internally did not approve of having a Jew with the rank of Capo. A couple weeks after his arrival he left on a S.S. truck to Auschwitz to exchange the dirty laundry. The inmate alliance of the German-Polish Blockaltesters and Capos conducted a search in the "Bekleidungs-Kammer" (clothing-room) and found some valuables. They reported it to the camp commandant who promptly approached it.

In the evening when the Capo Fuks returned, they gave him a good beating and next day sent him out to work on building a road adjoining the camp.

A young ambitious S.S. man kept an eye on him all that day torturing him continuously and before we had to return for the appeal, he shot him. He was replaced by a German inmate with a green (criminal) triangle who has arrived with a group of inmates to replace those that died or were beaten to death. Among the new arrivals was a man from Pruzany by the name of Noah Treger, a barber by profession who became the S.S. barber for our S.S. guards.

By the end of June 1944, the camp was ready, that is; the fence in place with bright lights on the posts lit up all night, new and tall watch-towers equipped with powerful projectors and machine-guns. We were told to expect a "Zugang", in camp language it meant a new group of inmates.

The next day they arrived. Some six hundred and fifty Jewish men. They came from a work camp "Pionki". Brought to Auschwitz where they received their tattooed numbers, went through all the formalities like shaving, disinfected showers, receiving clean underwear, pants and jackets and were sent on to us.

They were acquainted in life in camp. True, not to the kind like Auschwitz. It seemed that they had a nicer reception upon arrival then many other groups. They didn't even pass a selection, maybe because they were not emaciated as the Auschwitz inmates. In fact they looked like a healthy group of men between the ages of twenty to forty. The came dressed in civilian clothes which had a long wide red strip on either side of the pants and a red cross painted on the jackets. Their shirts which were supposed to serve as undershirts were new or almost new which did not escape notice of our overseers, the blockaltesters and Capos. The first thing they did was order the new arrivals to take them off and were given real camp undershirts.

Those new shirts were brought by Jews all over Europe to Auschwitz and continued their trip to our camp on the backs of the newly arrived Jews. They became a currency shortly after in the hands of our overseers in Barter for meat, sausage, butter, and liqueur with the civilian Poles that worked in the factory in which we started to work the following day.

We were divided in two twelve hour shifts and the day shift went to the plant. The other shifts remained in camp with those inmates that were engaged to work in the camp like the cooks, cleaners, and the big-shots like the "Lager-Altester", the "Blockaltesters", the "Lager Schrreiber", the Larger Capo and the two doctors. In a word, all those "Prominentia". The other big-shots, like the Capos who went with us to the factory.

The factory was about a kilometre from the camp and well worn, first by the French workers feet and later by us wide triad led from the camp to it. Half way we passed a small lake, some hundred by a hundred metres in size. The camp, trail and factory, run along the outskirts of the city Sosnowiec, three hundred metres away. Before there was this factory that use to produce wire. The Germans converted it into an ammunition factory by dividing it into two parts. In one part they produced heavy artillery shells of one hundred and fifty caliber. In the second part they produced eighty eight millimetre

anti-aircraft guns. I found out later that those guns were at that time the best of its kind.

Upon entering the plant we were divided in two groups. One was taken to were the shells were being made and the other to were the cannon barrels were being made. In the part of the factory, where the rest of the cannons were being made, we could not go to, for it was in the outside fence part of the plant. The part we worked in was fenced in by us at the same time as when we were erecting the camp fence.

In that factory were employed the six hundred French civilians, two thousand Poles from the city and vicinity, and now eight hundred Auschwitz inmates. There were only two entrances in the fenced in part of the plant and there was an S.S. man at each of them. The civilians had to show an ID passing the gate which was a busy place due to the large number of workers that kept on going in and out.

When the fence around the camp was finished, there was no need for any S.S. man to guard us, so some were recalled back to Auschwitz, manly of the young ones. Later on some S.S. men were taken away and replaced by older man in air force uniforms. Never the less there were enough S.S. man to make our life miserable.

There is no wonder that with time the guards have become apathetic in checking the I.D.'s due to the heavy traffic at the gates, and they stopped scrutinizing them. The women really didn't have to show them, as there were no women prisoners working there. As for the men prisoners, we had all clean shaven heads, while all civilians had hair or some hair on their heads.

The civilians were not so eager to reach for the ID every time they passed the gate. As a result, and in time, the civilians stopped showing their I.D.'s and just walked back and forth. Unless the guard was a stickler, and most S.S. man were, then the civilians showed it grudgingly.

The very first day we were assigned as assistances to the civilians, who to a Pole and who to a Frenchman. I walked into the part of the factory, where for the first time in my life I saw such gigantic lathes. People were working there producing cannon barrels. In that part of the factory, we were some thirty Jews assigned as helpers to the Polish and French tradesmen. Our job was to sweep the cement floors around the machines, pick up the metal shavings, to hand the tradesmen wrenches and other tools. In one word, we were errand boys.

Here for the first time my attending the technical trade school in Brest-Litowsk came in handy. Although our Capo came with us to work in reality he had nothing to do our say there, not having any concept of what is going

on. The work was very specialized, and there were enough engineer and Artisans who knew how to work or supervise.

I was assigned to a Frenchman who operated a large lathe. In the first couple hours he noticed that I have an idea about lathe operating. He encouraged me to try and work on it. When his eight hours shift ended and a pole came replace him, as the factory worked twenty-four hours a day, he told the pole that I am a tradesman and he can let me work a bit on the lathe. The Pole was delighted and let me work on the crude parts of the barrel. Convincing himself that he can on me he walked away to socialize with other workers.

He worked twelve hours a shift while the civilian workers, the Poles and French worked eight. This way I got to know all three men that worked at that particular lathe. As the Capo was seldom seen and the Civilian workers had no authority over us except when it concerns work. I used to walk away and look around to see the immensity of the place and what it takes to produce a cannon barrel. Due to my curiosity I learned that a cannon barrel is not made from one piece of steel but it consists of seven individual tubes that go one into the other. Only the very inside ones consists of two, the other tubes or casings fit into each other. The inner-most consists of a shorter part and a longer one. The shorter is on the bottom near the magazine where the firing takes place and this part gets soon used up or burned out and has to be replaced.

Each tube or casing had to be precise to the one five hundred of a millimetre and each lathe had his special part perform. On the lathe at which I was the assistant, they worked on the innermost casing.

It didn't take long for the supervisor of our part of the factory to notice that my civilian boss is loafing around and I am doing the work. He soon made me independent and I had no more boss over me.

From then on I used to spend twelve hours a day, six days a week or six nights a week at the lathe. We use to alternate, one week we worked day shift and one night shift.

Next to me was another lathe being over rated by three men during a twenty-four hour day, two Poles and a French man. They had very little to do with each other. Especially to do with the French man. Firstly, as soon as the eight hours were over they use to rush home, not wanting to spend an extra minute in the factory. Secondly, those two Poles thought very little of the French man, although to me he seemed to be more worldly then they. To my regret, I never got to know him. Firstly, because of the language problem and secondly because of his tendency to spend every free moment with his fellow

Frenchman working nearby. Frankly, I don't blame him, to be so far away from home and not entirely voluntarily, in times of war, the longing for dear ones, even the sound of the mother tongue can give some comfort.

With one of the two Poles I became very friendly. His name was Tadek Indelak and hailed from Katowice some ten kilometres away. He use to commute to work daily. He was a friend in the full sense of the word. Polite and trusting, he use to confide in me as if I were his childhood best friend. All his innermost secrets, even his relation and experience with his girlfriend he shared with me.

Quite often he use to express his sympathy with the Jews not using the word "Zydzi" (Jews) which many Poles used it as derogatory disrespectful towards Jew. Instead he used the words "Ci ludzie"(those people). He was careful not to use to me the word arrested or intern. When he use to speak about my past he didn't say "before you were brought here" or "before you were arrested", he used the word "W cywilu" (in civilian life". This shows the decency, the modesty of that young man.

The second Pole, some 5 years older than the first, a man of about thirty was not so polite when speaking of Jews, although he showed a fair amount of tolerance towards me. He used to justify it with the fact that I am the only craftsman among all the other Jews who worked in the plant, saying among all the Jews here, you are the only one working independently on a lathe. It did no good my telling him that I came from a shtetl where all tradesmen, craftsmen and artisans were all Jews and in all the shtetls around was the same. His girlfriend also worked in the same factory, a girl of about my age, about twenty. When they worked at night on the same shift she used to visit him during the half-hour midnight break when all the civilian workers used to get a meal. They too, as all civilians, used to come to the factory kitchen holding a dish with food. They would sit down to eat while we inmates used to watch with our mouths watering.

I used to watch as his girlfriend took two mouthfuls of food, turned up her nose and throw the food in the garbage can. I used to think to myself ; Look, she knows that I and the rest of us are hungry, why doesn't she offer it to me or to one of us instead of throwing it out.

A few nights later they both came back from the kitchen .He with his container of food, she empty handed. I understood that she does not approve of the factory's food and rather not bother taking it. Another week or so passed and again we were working the night shift. At midnight break the civilians went to get their meal. I see the Pole coming alone from the direction of the kitchen and holding in each hand a container with food. He

walks over to me stretching out one arm with a container towards me and says; This is from my girlfriend. She wants you to eat it. I took the container and looked inside. I see the food is untouched, it consists of a heaping ladle full of mashed potatoes covered with gravy, and n top a piece of warm sausage.

I hadn't seen such food, nor did I dare dream of such for years. After I finished eating, and scraped it clean, I turned to go to wash the container. The Pole would not hear of it saying that his girlfriend will wash both of them. When I asked him where she was, so that I could thank her for such a treat, he replied that she is embarrassed to come over so I should not feel obliged to her, as my benefactor. This happened several times. Yet her boyfriend used to tell me that she does not like Jews but that I am the exception.

It was too good to last. A short time later she got a permanent day job in the factory and the day shift did not get lunch at factory.

With the first Pole Tadek Indelak I became very close. After many conversations I discovered that he comes from a poor family. I realized that if he does not help me with food it is simply because he has nothing to give. He ate the midnight meal with much gusto.

One day he asked me if I could procure for him a pair of camp drawers. This question intrigued me very much, especially knowing that camp underwear was made of a special design for prisoners. They were a medium blue color with narrow dark blue stripes running through them for easy identification. He told me that an acquaintance of his got a pair from an inmate for a loaf of bread and succeeded in dying them to a darker shade that made them unrecognizable.

A few days later when we were changing the underwear I tore my pair into two pieces and instead of turning in a pair of underwear I threw on top of the pile of dirty underwear just half a pair. The Stubendienst (stube-elder) saw me throwing two items, A shirt and underpants. A week later I threw the other half. In this way I was left with and extra pair. The next day I took that pair to work and gave it to Tadek. The following morning he brought me a loaf of bread.

And so we started to barter, every two weeks I used to bring him a pair of underwear and he, in exchange, would bring a loaf of bread. The loaf of bread was far from stilling from my hunger but it helped.

The big-shots in camp now had one of their own in the clothing factory and started dealing with the civilian Poles in the factory. They did not barter for bread as this they had enough. They wanted sausages, meat, and

liquor. Each of those big-shots like the blockaltester (block-elder) Capos, registrar, and others found from among us a confidante who became the middle man between them and the Poles. Those big-shots used to decide on the price and the hungry Jews had to haggle with the Poles.

There was a Lager-Capo, a German inmate with a green triangle, a man of about sixty. He looked and acted as if he had spent his life behind bars. He approached me and proposed that I should be middle-man, which I gladly accepted.

The camp Capo did not go with us to the factory. His job was to see that the camp yard, the outside of the barracks, the washrooms, and the bathhouse were all in running order. Not that he lifted a finger to do anything, rather he ensured that others did it. One of his jobs was to be at the gate and help the S.S. men to count as we were marching out in the morning and returning. When it became known that we are stealing things from camp and selling them to the Poles, the S.S. started to search us on our way in and out. This Lager-Capo used to help them search us.

While searching others he used to bring a little flat package. Pretending to search me he would place it in my jacket and let me through as if he just finished searching me. At work I would open it up and offer it to Tadek Indelak, quoting the price the Capo gave me, adding half a loaf of bread for my trouble.

Those transactions took place two to three times a week. Having tested me and finding me trustworthy, he started bringing me the nice shirts that the six hundred and fifty Jews arrived in from Pionky via Auschwitz and were told to take off when they came to us. Those shirts in war-torn Poland were unobtainable and were worth a kilogram of sausage or meat or even a bottle of liquor.

For my trouble I never received more than half a loaf of bread and shared it with my friend Leibel Bliskofsky, one of the two other partners in our bread ration. By that time our third partner was moved to the other shift and to another block. The two of us remained friends and shared every bit of food. I can say in all sincerity that in those days I was the bigger earner, although he tried to reciprocate.

A couple times during that era we received a few cigarettes. I, not smoking, gave them to Leibel who did smoke. The next morning, as we received our bread, I see Leibel cutting off a piece of his bread and sliding it over to my side of the bench. To my question as to what it is for, he answered the cigarettes. I am so glad that I did not accept it, otherwise I would not forgive myself, even today.

As in Auschwitz proper, so here in Sosnowicz, the privileged or prominent inmates had it relatively good. For us Jews our fate was to remain locked up till the end of our lives regardless how long that miserable existence may be. The only way out was the crematorium. For the Germans, Poles, or Frenchmen it was a matter of time till the war came to an end and their sentence would be resolved. Their personal desire was to stay alive and make their being there as bearable, as comfortable, and as pleasant as possible. To this end they used to organize different amusements. Of course the object of their ridicule and mockery had to be the Jews.

All these started with our first "Lager Altester" (camp elders) a German inmate in the mid thither with a green triangle (criminal). A giant of a man who use to take delight in seeing a Jew being beaten. He introduced boxing matches at which two starving Jews were fighting it out with bare fists over bruised faces and bleeding noses for a piece of bread.

One such match got him once so excited that he wanted to participate himself, but what sense would such a match make between a six foot four inch tall man weighing two hundred and fifty pounds against a five foot eight inch man of ninety pounds. So the Lager Altester called for a volunteer. As the majority of the inmates at that time were the Italian Jews. Therefore it had to be translated into Italian.

To everybody's surprise a young man stepped forward. We all thought that he did it as a joke or maybe he didn't understand the challenge. A German speaking Italian Jew explained to him twice more what it is all about and that young man insisted on challenging the Lager Altester.

The two of them got into the temporary arena. The Lager Altester by a head taller that his opponent and weighing three times as much. It looked laughable. The Lager Altester sent for two pairs of boxing gloves which he made in his room and they faced each other. Again the Lager Altester turns to the interpreter and says to him; Tell him, pointing at his opponent, not to be afraid to hit me back, make him understand it. When the Italian heard what the interpreter said he replied; I am not afraid of him, he should be afraid of me. His reply brought a smile on everyone's face, such empty bravado.

When the bout started we all realized that the Italian Jew was an excellent boxer and was not joking when he said that the Lager Altester should be afraid of him. When the fight was over, the Jewish young man was the undisputed winner despite the opponents size, weight, and strength.

I will admit that not withstanding the embarrassment the Lager Altester took the defeat in good taste. Some of the big shots gave the winner some extra bread for which he worked hard and justly deserved.

That same Lager Altester a couple weeks later left the camp for Auschwitz, due to a sore that developed on his leg and refused to heal. In his place came another Lager Altester. This time a German with a red triangle (Political internee) a man of about fifty whose face expressed both intelligence and authority. Now and then, during the appeal, (Reveille) when he use to speak to us for a few minutes issuing new orders or decrees, one couldn't help but admire his bearing voice his diction that use to arouse so much respect that even the S.S. men, always yelling use to fall silent and listen to him.

On our way to and from work we had to sing. We Jews did not feel like singing but the dozen and a half Russian inmates who were fed better and hoped to get out alive sang patriotic soviet songs. Eventually my friend Laibl and I joined them in singing . To us it was a secret protest against Nazism and all it stands for.

When the S.S. found out the meaning of the words they forbid us to sing Russian songs, so we started to sing Polish vulgar and crude songs. The more obscene, the more Polish Jews sang. Especially when we use to line up in the factory in order to march back to camp when all the Poles use to be watching us and listening.

This too was a sort of protest mixed with contempt for the guards for the people around and for humanity at large.

One summer morning as we were going back to camp after a nights work passing by the small lake half way between the factory and camp we saw a man fully dressed floating face down on the water. It was clear to us that the man is dead. At the time we did not pay to much attention to it. The next day in the factory we found out from some civilian Polish workers that it was a Jew who apparently committed suicide.

Every Jew in the camp talked about it and I am sure that every one was bothered with the question; What drove him to it? How did a Jew manage to stay alive until the middle of nineteen forty four? Was he hidden at the house of a Pole and paid him for it and when his money ran out he was driven out? Or maybe the Pole feared for his life and told him to go. How hopeless was his situation that forced him to commit suicide? What tragic story or stories that man took with him.

It seemed to me that at that time I felt more sorry for him than for myself. As far as I am concerned my fate was already sealed. I have no more to say about it, it is only a matter of time. But that poor Jew, for him every minute, every hour was a struggle. How many times a day did his mood change from hope to despair? How many times a day did the sky fall on him

where he managed to lift it only so that it will come crushing on him again. Is there an end to Jewish suffering, to Jewish misery. Does it always end in death.

That event lay on my mind for a long time, maybe it was an exception. He was no ordinary muscleman skin and bones that were falling by the hundreds daily in the camp. This Jew dared to fool, to outsmart the Germans and tried to survive them. To me he was a falcon shot down in flight.

We did not work on Sundays. On sunny Sundays many of us use to sit on the ground leaning against the barrack wall watching the civilian Polish population walking leisurely on the city sidewalks a stone throw from us. We use to feel a terrible melancholy enveloping us as we couldn't help but think of our final moments. Yet during the two hours compulsory bed rest the hypocrisy of it on Sunday afternoons we use to lie on our bunks and dream aloud about a miracle that we fervently prayed should happen, namely that we should somehow come out alive and what we would do with it. Many of us wished to be guards around gas chambers into which the victorious army will be herding the Germans just like they are herding us now.

How naive we were to even think about surviving and even more so about thinking that the world, the leaders of the powers whose army's are now squeezing the Germans from every side, give a damn about the Jews who at that time were being hunted down to the last. We certainly didn't think that after the war will be over the conquerors will let Germany get off with the symbolic hanging of a couple dozen mass murderers and let the other thousands upon thousands other murderers and their collaborators get away. Better still, let them into their own countries.....while keeping the doors closed to the few victims, the remnants of European Jewry that survived.

Our camp numbered close to nine hundred men, ninety five percent Jews. Now and then a group of new inmates use to arrive from Auschwitz to replace those that died and only Jews died. The non-Jews were the German. Polish, and Russian prisoners. They all were a privileged group holding the best positions like the Block Altesters, Capos, and cooks. Even the Russian prisoners had it better than us Jews. The dozen and a half Russian inmates was a mixed lot and kept to themselves. Only I and my friend Leibl Bliskowsky were treated warmer because we spoke Russian and came from the Eastern part of Poland which was annex to the Soviet Union in 1939, so we were considered country men. We found out that among them are four red army Lieutenants, one of them a Jew by the name of Naftaly. That he is a Jew the Germans did not know. But a couple weeks later he himself made if official. His status did not change because of it, for once you are in

Auschwitz you can not go lower. Amongst them were also two former Ukrainian policeman. That is Nazi collaborators. They must have committed some transgression and were sent to Auschwitz. There were among them a few former Soviet soldiers from different detachment. While there were telling each other stories from front I overheard one telling how during a retreat on the Ukrainian front a truck load of Soviet Jews escaping the German advance caught up with them and how they, the Soviet soldiers, forced the Jews off the truck and abandoning their position speeded away deeper into the Soviet Union leaving the Jews at the mercy of the approaching Germans.

They were a mixed beg of individuals, from different pats of the Soviet Union and of different outlooks and characters. The officers and a couple of the former soldiers were decent people.

One of them, the oldest in year, was somewhere between forty five and fifty whom the Russians called "Uncle Ghrysha" started questioning me yet in mid summer about Auschwitz and especially about Birkenau. He wanted to know every detail. Asking about every step of the trainloads of Jew from the moment they arrive to the moment the doors of the gas chambers close behind them. Even the process of burning the bodies and disposing of the ashes. He admitted that he spent in Auschwitz one day, was brought from jail went through the entire process of admittance and sent on to us to Sosnowiec.

That Uncle Ghrysha was close to one of the Lieutenants, a tall handsome and well built man who use to listen in on our conversations.

I was intrigued by his questions, but less than two months later I understood why.

It happened at about ten in the evening when I was working night shift that we suddenly heard a piercing whistle. Most of the machines fell silent and I could hear the Capo yelling; fall in, everybody fall in. By the time we were lined up properly in the commotion there were S.S. men swarming all around with the camp commandant in charge. We were counted several times and it turned out that there were two inmates short, the so called Uncle Ghrysha and that tall handsome red army Lieutenant. The S.S. immediately started a search and we were ordered to return to work.

The search continued all night with no success, they were not found.

In the morning the Russian prisoners were ordered to take of their civilian clothes that were marked with wide red crosses and given the standard Auschwitz striped pajama-like uniforms. Their leather footwear taken away and given shoes made of cloth tops with wooden soles.

It didn't take more than two weeks before the old story repeats itself. We are being counted and this time four prisoners are missing. The S.S. conduct a search and come up with nothing.

The first two escapees have simply turned their clothes inside out so that the red crosses were not seen and put on civilian caps gotten from Poles so as to cover their shaven heads and simply walked by the guard who did not bother to check the I.D.'s. Now the second group didn't apparently have any help from the civilian Poles, they just simply overwhelmed the guard, a man of about fifty, not a S.S. man but dressed in an airforce uniform the fence post, then the four inmates ran away.

Next day a truck arrived with S.S. men and took the remaining dozen Russian prisoners back to Auschwitz.

Two days later the camp commandant ordered to dig in two wooden post a metre and a half apart and to fasten to them a piece of pipe connecting the two posts two and a half metres off the ground. The contraption has to be in the middle of the appeal square.

We were speculating as of the purpose of it. Only the next midmorning as we were sleeping after the nights work the door of our barrack opens up and in walks in two of the four escapees. They were the two younger ones of the four. One did not look to be eighteen yet by the name of "Misha", a nice quiet young man or boy, the other in his mid twenties of whom there was talk that he was a German collaborator and a policeman.

As soon as they brought in and left in our barrack, which was where they were sleeping previously, we all got up. Suddenly the purpose of the two posts with the metal bar across became clear, it was a gallow.

We all wanted to know what transpired with them since their escape and what happened to the other two that escaped with them. But our entire barrack consisted of Polish or Italian Jews who were never close to them. The only two that were was I and Leibl Bliskowsky. But we did not dare in such a moment ask them questions.

The two escapees sat on a bunk facing the window. Looking out they could see the appeal platz yard on which there stood the newly erected gallow. The younger of the two "Mishka" turned to me and asked; When did they put up this "Turnik"? (Russian horizontal bar used in gymnastics). The day after you escaped, I answered. Seasoning that they were not caught the first day after their escape. Thus to drive away any sinister thoughts from their mind. It seemed that for a moment I succeeded to set their mind at ease. But after the distribution of the mid-day soup the camp Capo came in with a razor in hand and started to shave their necks their composure broke.

After the Capo left there was a dead silence in the barrack. Many long minutes past before some of us started to whisper to each other. But those close to them didn't dare to utter the merest sound.

The two of the condemned set next to each other looking out the window. The younger one murmuring something to himself while tears kept on rolling slowly on his cheeks. Nobody went over to them to speak to them. I felt that is my duty to go over more than my friend Leibls, because of the age different. But what was there for me to say? Still I went over and sat down near the younger one joining them in looking out the window. Now being close to him I could identify his murmur as an old Russian parting song from a son to a mother. This song I heard for the first time from my parents when we were in Chomsk, when we were sitting in the dark in the long evenings in 1941. In those despair filled nights my parents use to quietly hum sometimes this song. A depressing and befitting song to an already hopeless situation.

Today I am not sure if I said something to those two escapees or not, but if even yes, I doubt if they have heard or paid attention to it.

The barrack door opened and a couple S.S. men with some Capos marched in. They took the two escapees into the wash room from where they soon emerged with their hands tied behind their backs. We were ordered out of the barracks and form a large quadrangle around the gallows. Every S.S. man and guard entered the camp, except those on the watch towers, and formed a circle around us. For the first time I saw them putting around us machine guns in the camp proper.

To me, to all of us, this display of force looked ludicrous. What were they afraid of? We will oppose the hanging? They were beating us, torturing us, and killing us daily with no opposition of any kind without even a word of protest. What did they think we would do now?

The Lager (camp) Capo tied on two nooses on the metal bar, put underneath a short bench on which the two Russian escapees were told to get on. They had to be helped as they found it difficult to do with their hands tied behind. There they stood with their nooses dangling in their faces, while the "Rapportfurer" (S.S. registrar) read out to them in German their death sentence. Not that they understood, nor that it mattered to them. The camp commandant nodded and the camp Capo kicked the bench out from under them. Their bodies were taken to Auschwitz that very same afternoon.

Among the six hundred and fifty Jews that came to our camp from "Pionky", one could find a diversity of characters and intellects. From total ignoramuses to Ph.D.'s, one whom I got to know had a Ph.D. in chemistry.

Some were ordinary Jews, humble, meek, unpretentious, others were self respecting, to a degree vain and proud, maybe to much so for their good.

One of them I will mention. He was a young man in my age of the twenties one for the city of Radom by the name Chatzkl Silvergerg. We were in the same barrack, worked the same shift, and because our close age and my months in Auschwitz he "bent his reverence" and picked me from all the others to be his confidant.

Once during our night shift, he approached me and pointing discreetly with his eyes in the direction of a young girl whom I have never seen before at work. He said to me; You see that girl, she is a Jewish girl, a very close friend of mine since childhood. She has Aryan papers and passes as a Christian. Somehow she found out where I am so she applied for a job in that plant with the intention of getting me out of here. She has connections to make for me Aryan papers and away of getting me out of here. So what are you waiting for? I asked him. The answer came from a solemn face; "I don't want to owe her my life", he said. I looked at him as if he lost his mind.

The girl worked there for about a week. Unable to talk him into bending his pride, she left. After the war I found out that he did not survive the difficult last couple months of the war.

My close friend Leibl Bliskowsky worked at assembling the cannon barrels. As I have mentioned earlier the canon barrel consisted of six separate tubes that fitted into each other. The very inside one consisted of two parts. The lower part use to take the impact of the explosion during the firing and use to get damaged much sooner that the upper part. So it had to be exchanged often. Those two inside tubes were joined by precision made grooves and niches. In order to save labour and material, only the lower part use to be changed. The joining of those two parts, or rather the locking them together, required delicate work with hammer file and specially made tools. One excessive motion with the file or slam with a rubber hammer could cause many hours of extra work. Still did Leibl with his Polish civilian co-worker managed to sabotage those locking mechanisms in such a way that could not be detected during the final inspection.

As a result many of those cannons use to be sent back for repairs after a short time in service.

Leibl became good friends with that Pole who was a true socialist and as such carried no animosity towards Jews. Once he offered to sell Leibl a handgun for ninety mark. The idea of possessing a weapon appealed to me very much, for after the successful escape of the first two Russians and two out of the second four, the idea of escaping awakened again in me.

unfortunately the lest of procuring the ninety marks has proven insurmountable.

That Poles socialistic leanings were apparently known, for some time later in a dark nights, one of the directors of the plant we worked in, a Pole and Nazi collaborator by the name of Zabicky, was assassinated. The Germans, with the help of the Polish collaborationist Police arrested some Polish workers of the plant, among them that Pole under suspicion of having something to do with the assassination. However, no prove could be found against the arrested men and two weeks later they returned to work.

During the midnight break, we Jews use to gather in quiet corners of the plant and conduct political debates. Often the civilian Polish worker use to join in. Not fearing betrayal from either side, we exchanged ideas and opinions freely.

During such a midnight break I walked over to my friend Leibl for a chat and found him deep in conversation with several inmates and Polish civilians. During that conversation one of us Jews started saying aloud; If we should survive, but before he had the chance to finish what he had in mind he was interrupted by a Pole who said loud and clear; If you will survive we Poles will finish you off. I noticed that a couple of the Poles felt uncomfortable with his pronouncement, but nobody chastised him for it.

I have not been mentioning much about our third partner Shmuel Rosenboim (Der Maltsher). The reason being is that since he started working in the other shift I have not been seeing much of him. Still I'll mention one event in which he played an important part.

It happened on a day in fall of 1944 before dark. We were staying in formation ready to go out to work while the day shift was just coming in from the factory. As usual there are S.S. men to escort us to work and the others that have just brought in the day shift. This time there are a couple of none commissioned S.S. officers around. I watch with astonishment as Shmuel Rosenboim walks out from the formation that has just returned from the plant, under each arm he carries fair size parcels, he walks over to one of the N.C. officers, hands him the two parcels, turns around, and joins the column that is just marching into the camp. Each of us started to speculate and try to understand the event that just transpired. It turns out that Shmuel Rosenboim was already for a time the middle-man between the top inmates in camp, like the Lager Altesters and Block Altesters and some civilian Poles with whom he use to Barter clothing provided by the Capo in charge of the clothing-room for food delicacies not available to the public in Germany. It were those big-shots inmates who wanted to find favor in the eyes of the

camp commandant and arranged the procurement of two turkeys for the birthday party of the commandant that took place a couple days later.

Somehow Shmuel Rosenboim succeeded in warming himself into a cozy friendship with some influential inmates who had a close relationship with the hightest authority in camp, namely the camp commandant himself.

The camp commandant was a typical S.S. man of the old guard who joined the S.S. in the very early years of the Nazi regime out of necessity. Without education or moral depth he quickly ajusted to the S.S. enviroment. The brutality required and executed during the thirties did not bother his conscience. From a store window washer to reach to his S.S. rank he had to excel in his unquestionable devotion and cruelty. His rudeness use to manifest itself not only towards us inmates but even towards his equals.

When the allied have liberated France and many Nazi big-wings found themselves back in Germany without the high positions they held in France, the Nazi hierarchy appointed many of them in all sorts of factories and undertakings. Such one was appointed in our factory. What his assignment was we did not know and I doubt if he knew. He use to wander around aimlessly a couple hours a day among the workers and noisy machines.

How it happened I don't remember, but I remember this middle age German starting to beat up one of us inmates. He only stopped when he ran out of steam and started panting.

Within a few minutes I saw the Lager (camp) commandant striding in. His appearance and threatening looks made us inmates uneasy. The three hundred pound S.S. man whom we have just seen for the first time, in his uncontrolable rage, in his unbuttoned, long, black leather coat, the laps flapping like two forbidding wings of the angel of death threw fear into us. We were wondering as to who will be his victim this time.

To our astonishment he strides over to that new arrived German-party-big-shot and in a load almost yelling voice says to him; What right have you to order around my men? using the words "Meine Loeite" (My men). It was the first time in camps or in ghetto that I heard a German reffering to us Jews as man.

It seemed that the camp commandant didn't receive a satisfactory answer for he raised his voice even higher. Apparently the commandant won the arguement, for from then on that civilian German had nothing to do with us inmates.

We knew only too well that the camp commandant didn't do it out of love for us Jews, he resented the fact that that civilian interfered in matters that were under the commandants jurisdiction.

From time to time a civilian Pole or Frenchman use to let one of us try to work at the Lathe, but not willingly. There were two reasons for it. Firstly they were afraid that if a Jew will learn to operate a Lathe, they will loose their job. Secondly, should the learner by chance in a split second make any mistake or damage, they would be held responsible.

Sduch an accident happened. A young boy of no more then eighteen tried to perform an operation on a gun barrel and took off a fraction of a millimetre too much. But instead of blaming the civilian who was suppose to watch him, the young boy was held responsible by the foreman.

At that time it was considered sabotage. However, since the damage could be repared, the camp commandant ordered to give him twenty five lashes. He was taken to a secluded corner of the plant where an S.S. man delivered the lashes. According to regulations the camp commandant as well as the camp senior were present. At six in the evening as we were lining up to return to camp, I noticed the young man, or rather boy, a coupke rows in front of me. He stood there weeping like a child that he was from the lashes that at times killed a man.

We stood there surrounded by the S.S. guards that were escorting us to camp and by the hundreds of the civilian workers. The camp senior, seeing the crying boy, walks over to hm and says; What are you crying for? All the boy could utter was; "I am innocent". The camp senior looks at him and right there in front of the S.S. and all the civilians says; You are innocent? I am already fifteen years in concentration camp innocently, what are you complaining of innocence.

I was surprised at that boldness of the camp senior that dared to proclaim his innocence in front of all the S.S. and the civilians.

At times I reminisce about those several hundred Jews with me in that camp Sosnowiec. The majority of them were in the late teens and in the twenties. Many of them demonstrated all kinds of potential talent. A few of them showed virtuous qualities as singers who used to entertain us, if this is the right word, with old-time sentimental and moving Yiddish songs while we were getting ready for the night.

I know of two from that group that survived and are now Chazonim (Cantors) here in Toronto. There were among us men in the late twenties and thirties that have studied in Austria , Italy, and even Germany up to the mid-thirties. Others were artfull story tellers with unexhautible sources of storys from personal life. About one of them I will dedicate a few lines.

His family name was Warner, his given name nobody knew nor did anybody care. In mid twenties of medium hight with no outwardly semitic

features. He was intelligent, manifested keenness and cleverness. Characteristic of Yeshiva students from times gone by. But his most noticeable virtue was his wit. He could not utter two sentences withour squizzing in a joke, yet they were always keen and amusing.

What I want to tell about him is the way this intelligent and apparently shrewd man got himself into Auschwitz.

He was born in Germany to as far as he knew Christian parents and of course was not circumcised. Served in the Germany army and in late 1943 was stationed in Paris. As many soldiers, he was not happy with life in the arly and was longing for home, particularly a rich and comfortable home like his parents. His father was a movie producer. In late 1943, or early 1944, he heard from a friend that Jewish men are not serving in the Jewish army. The idea stayed in his mind and after ruminating for a while he rememberedhis father mentioning once that one of his parents was Jewish. Not realizing the consequences, he ran to his captain asking to be released from the army. The captain told him to get out thinking that it was a joke. Werner, however, insisted that it is true. The captain then told him to go back to his quarters. Two days later he was given a ticket home Somewhere along the road he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwits. Werner unfortunatly was shot during our march from Sosnowiec to Mauthausen in the second half of January 1995, when Auschwitz and all affiliated camps were being marched deeper into Germany. With his death died his dream of producting a movie about the war.

From the friendlier civilian Poles we knew much about the military situation. We also knew that the red army is already at the vistula river. It was so near yet for us Jews, so far. We understood that with the next push or offersive, the red army will reach us. But will the Germans wait until the offersive to annihilate us or will they start sooner?

And so did the autumn pass accompanied by the unachievable dream of liberation. Not having any connection with Auschwitz we knew nothing of what was taking place there. Of course trucks used to go back and forth between us several times a week and sometimes a block-elder or Capo used to get a ride, but they did not share the news with us.

Christmas eve we went to work. The civilians, Poles, and Frenchman were allowed to go home two hours earlier. The Poles I knew came over to wish me a happy holiday. Suddenly all the engines stopped for the first time since we started working there. The silence was eerie. We sat or stood in groups not knowing what to do with ourselves. In that strange stillness while

all the civilians, all the free people left for their homes or families, I and the rest of us felt the deep hurt and pain for everyone and everything we had lost.

There was no reason for us to stay in the plant. We were lined up and marched to the camp. To our surprise we received peeled potatoes with a dinner spoonful of jam. When we finished, we received another portion of potatoes but without jam. It was the first time that I went to sleep without hunger pangs.

The year 1945 started with the same routine as the previous year. We would get to the factory at 6 a.m. or 6 p.m., punch in 12 hours,of work, then back to the barracks, always accompanied by the inseperable and so familiar nagging hunger .

On November 17, 1944, I came to work the night shift at 6p.m. Everything in the plant seemed normal, although a certain tension could be flet among the workers as a day or two earlier a rumor spread that the Red Army startes an offensive along the Vistula River. Common sense dictated that the Germans would do something with us Jews. The question was: Will they take us to Birkenau to be gassed or will they shoot us here? One thing we were sure of was that they will not leave us here alive. If there was ever a time to try to save ourselves it had to be now. Our work supposedly went on but at a very slow pace and the management did not pay attention. We inmates kept on walking from one to another asking for ideas or advice. The closest friend I had ther was Leibel Bliskofsky and I wanted to be with him for a few minutes alone. But as soon as I went over to him or he to me there were instanly others around. We simply had no chance to be alone. It was because or our longer stay in Auschwitz that all others thought that we might have some sort of solution to our critically desperate situation.

In this confusion the time was running out. About 10p.m. that evening we heard a whistle and I noticed a large number of guards at the entrances. We were ordered to line up in order to o back to the camp. Here, I thought to myself the game is over. In they will take us to Birenau or shoot us in the camp.

As we stayed in the factory lined up five in a row surrounded by our guards all lights suddenly went out abd throughout the entire plant there was total darkness. I realized that then was the time to run and hide in the factory, but I needed a few seconds to get used to the darkness in order not to run into an S.S. man. The S.S. men were everywhere. Those were the precious few seconds that I wasted, For as I was preparing for the dash the lights came on and I missed the chance. I looked around and saw that all the rows were even, nobody was missing, probably for the same reason as mine.

I knew then that for the second time in my life I missed the chance to save myself. The first time as were leaving the ghetto as Shalom Bernshtein gave me a prod and told me to come with him. While I was hesitating he got off the sled and walked into Krucels mill and now again I missed my chance.

We were led into the camp and told to prepare for a march. We each received a whole loaf of bread which I immediately cut into quarters and put in my pockets. We were told to each take a blanket and so we remained outside until 5a.m. of January 18 and then we were let out of the camp five abreast into the unknown.

We were led through the city of Sosnowiec as the city was just awakening. It was a ong long time since I walked in a street between houses. Now and then a person walks by looking at us with curiousity but did not stop.

I'm too busy looking around the houses and streets to notice our guards. Finally we are out of the city and in an open field. The road we are on is covered with snow but well used. The wind cuts in my face, around the neck and penetrates our so called coats to the bone. I notice that some of us have wrapped around themselves with their blankets and I do the same. The blanket does break the wind. Now I observe our guards and am surprised that I didn't notice it earlier. The entire complement of our guards that consisted mainly of S.S. men has changed. More then half of them consist now of older men in the age of between forty-fifty and they are dressed in air-force uniforms. To a twenty or twenty two year old young man a fifty year old is an old man. They walk stooped along our lines. The collars of their coats are up as protection against the wind. They don't look at us but seem to be preoccupied with their own thoughts. They streighten only up and became aggressive when a S.S. man gets closer.

The S.S. men have a new role, they walk up and down our column making sure there are no strugglers. If some one falls behind, he gets beaten and if this does not help, he is ordered to get off the road and is shot. At the very end of the column I notice a couple dozen of us are pulling and pushing a fully loaded large farmers wagon. With night fall, we enter a town called Boiton ("Biton" in Polish). We are locked inside a school. At least we are protected from the wind and there is enough room to strech out. I eat up a quarter of my bread and make sure the other three quarters are deep in my pockets. Apparently I slept well for when I woke up before day break I found only two quarters of my bread. Overnight somebody helped himself to one quarter. I missed the loss but in all honesty I did not begrudge the theif. I knew only too well the feelings of hunger.

With day break we were driven outside to continue the march. Not receiving anything to eat or drink, I ate one of my two quarters of bread. We continued marching all day long. It was already dark when we past through Guwice (Gleiwitz). On the other side of town we were herded into some public building in which there was hardly room enough to lie down. In the middle of the night I got up to use the washroom and had literally to tread on people to get there. When I finally made tback to my room, there was no thought of finding a place to lie down and I had to spend the rest ofthe night on my feet. That morning I finished my last quarter of bread not knowing that that was the last piece of bread, or any food for that matter, I will see for the next two weeks. After marching the whole day we were locked up again in some building where we were just as tightly crowded as in the previous one. That night because of the cold I had again to use sthe washroom. Having learning my lesson the previous night I wasn't about to spend another half a night standing, so I urinated on the floor lying down. The blanket on which I was partly lying and partly being covered with sucked up some of it, but by morning it was dry.

That morning I had nothing left to eat. In that wagon that some of us were forced to pull and push lie the guards knapsacks. Below the pile of knapsacks lie many loafs of bread and tins of meat and other assorted cans of food which the guards use to eat while escorting us. Those pushing the wagon use to try and stick their hand in the wagon to pinch off a piece of bread. One considered himself lucky if successfull. If however a guard noticed, he use to give the guilty one such a beating that he would remember the rest of his just shortened life. Worse still was if a S.S. man noticed, they use to take the transgressor to the side of the road and shoot him. It was even worse for those who were harnessed to the wagon. They had to pull with their last bit of strength without having a chance even to try to get a piece of bread.

Not having eaten three four days we barely draged our feet, but for those pulling the wagon it was much worse. They loterally use to fall away and replaced by others. If the one that fell could still get up, he was sent back to the marching, if not, he would be draged off the road and shot. I would have liked to be one of those pushers but what if they would put me to pull the wagon? Would I last until the evening? I decided not to volunteer.

That night we were herded into a school building. It was a two story large building well lit, roomy enough to walk from room to room and floor to floor. We could easily see the guards ourside. A few of my acquaintance approached me to suggest that if I will go with them we will make an attempt

to escape. Their plan was to jump together from the window down on the guard below, throw a blanket around him and make a run for it.

It was a bold idea but to me impractical. Where will we run hungry, exhausted, in prison garb, and already on German soil. To me it meant suicide. I refused to join them and they would not go withour me. With day break we continued our march. At about ten in the morning we entered a town of some twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. We are being lid what seemed to me to be the main street. It is a cold but sunny morning without ever a breeze, it is bearable. Our camp commandant walks as usual in the middle of the street. On one side of him marches the Rapportfureer and on the other a SS none commissioned officer, we reffere to him as the executioner, as he seems to take delight in shooting. Behind them we march five in a row a long line of "Haftlinge" (inmates) surraunded by guards and at the very end a large wagon fully loaded pulled by prisoners.

It is what I would call a typical German town. There are people in the street, they look at us with curiosity and yet with an expression that they would rather not see us. Their faces betray tention and anxiety. From there sidwalk they yell out to our camp commandant; What shall we do? Shall we run or stay? He yelled back to them; No, no, stay, you have lots of time. Abone me comes a voice. I look up and see a young hafty blond German women leaning our from an upper floor teooing; We are not moving, we are not running, we have no fear.

The camp commandant beams. along the street people keep on asking him what to do. He is mow a big man the former window washer, people are asking him advise, his people are showing him respect. In his visdow he tells them all to stay.

I don't believe my ears. Is it possible that the red army is already this close that Germans will become refugees, leaving behind their homes and possessions? Are they indeed losing the war? I realize that my situation is hopeless and I will not see the fonal victory. But to see Germans on German soil contemplating to run from the approaching red army is never the less exhilarating.

That evening we reached a town Ratibor or Rathamer. I am not sure with the name for we were in those two placed. We were led into a large ramp and unheated slaughter house. The building was made entirely from stone and cement. The huge slopping slaughter ramp was still wet and sloppery from the day's slaughter. The smell of blood and intestine hang heavy in the air. It was so cold during the night that we spent the night huging each other in order not to freeze. In the morning I saw a few of our

men lieing on wet slaughter platform dead, there bodies noticably swollen. How they got to that platform I don't know. Death could have come from many quarter like exhaustion, hunger, cold, a beaten during the previous day and others.

It is already daylight, yey we are not moving out. An hour goes by and another. At ten o'clock we hear a rumor that they are going to cook for us soup, we get livelier, it's almost a week that we had anything cooked, four days that I had nothing to eat or drink. How long can we go on like this? If somebody would have told me in Sosnowiec that I could go on for a week without food or drink, I would laugh in his face and yet here I am still alive and on my feet.

Around one thirty in the afternoon, we are being lined up for soup. Some bowls appear from somewhere and the first couple dozen receive their soup, but suddenly they run out of bowls. The others will have to wait until the first group will finish and turn in the bowls. They have not finished their soup yet when suddenly in walks our rapportfurer with a group of our SS guards. They order us to fall in not giving a chance to the few to finish their soup. We are being driven outside and ordered to march quickly.

We are proceeding much faster then till now, I can feel the urgency, the haste in their purpose. Still the first thing that comes to my mind is the bowl of soup that I have been deprived of, yet I wounder how the few that did get the soup but didn't get the chance to finish it felt. The other thing that puzzles me is the sudden hurry. I notice that we are not marching on a main road as before, but on a secondary one between snow covered feilds where every couple hundred or so metres stands a farm stead.

There is no lead up to our march. It is starting to get dark. A column of German soldiers catches up to us and pass. They are dressed in ordinary vermacht uniforms. Each of them sits on or runs along a small farmer sled that is pulled by an under nourished horse. All we can see in the sled is a bit of straw. As they pass us in a single line they gesticulate in such a way as if to say "It is all over". Some of them say in Ukrainian, in a couple hours more you'll be free. I suddenly realize that those are Ukrainian volunteers that joined the German army. The mind does not want or is unable to except such good news. However, as if to confirm there words, we suddenly here the staccato of machine guns coming from behind us which couldn't have been for than two kilometres back. Is it possible that the red army is this close?

We enter a small forest which is crawling with German soldiers working feverishly at mining the trees. I see as they tie around each tree trunk three to four sticks of explosives about a metre above tha ground. I realize

that they will explode it when the Soviet tanks will enter the forest or even before in order to form a barricade against the tanks. The soldiers were so absorbed with their work that they didn't even glance at us, as if close to a thousand men under guard passing no more that two metres from them to ghosts.

It is night and we are still marching. The first time at night. I know that the Russians can't be far behind, there might be a chance to sneak away, but then what? To go back into the forest I'm sure to get caught by the soldiers, to wounder around behing the forming front line, I'll get caught too. To hide n some bushes, either I'll freeze or die of hunger. So we keep on marching for we must, anyone that falls behind is shot. About midnight we started to slow down. It is possible due to our airforce guards that were all older men and began to tire.

I don't know how to describe that night. After an endless march from previous afternoons, with liberation only a few kilometres beind, which we could tell by the thunder of the canons, and yet so far as long as we are in the hands in beasts. Still the march continued. Before dawn as I dragged my feet, I noticed that my eyes are closing and I am falling asleep. Drained of strenghs, beyond exhaustion, walking in a daze, one prayer to go keeps on repeating in my mind; Let me just once more have a warm drink. May it even be the so called camp tea and you can put an end to my anguish.

The total exhausion and cold keeps closing the eyes, they just don'y want to stay open. We walk like drunkards. Each one wants to hold on to the next guy who shakes him off, he has trouble to walk himself.

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Chapter 13

I*******THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF PAGE 818

With day light the sleepiness eases off a bit. The march continues. The road although a secondary one, looks abandoned and so do the scattered farms around. From time to time we hear an explosion but can not tell the direction it comes from. There is not a living soul in sight. A total silence. But we hope that the Russians are getting closer. We pass a cluster of houses. Am I seeing or imagining a person's head in a window. Otherwise there is total emptiness.

Some kilometers further, we get to a cross road. Here we see a scattered military vehicle or a civilian one packed with civilians. In mid afternoon we approach some town. Our march has changed into feet dragging. I cannot tell if it is due to the guards exhaustion or lack of yesterday's urgency. In any case we are taking our time and I look around. Ahead of us is a bridge over a river. In fact the town's outskirts start along the opposite bank. As we start out on the bridge I notice that the bridge is quite high above the river and it give us a good vantage point. I look around and notice along the far side of the shore a long row of shallow holes and in each of them stands or sits a single soldier.

Even to me, an inexperienced in military matters, the whole thing looked very unprofessional. They looked exposed not only to artillery but even to rifle fire. The tiny holes could not protect them from anything. As we get closer I realize that those are boys of not older than fifteen or sixteen years. I think to myself; "They will not save Germany".

However, the moment we entered the town, my opinion changed dramatically. There was a constant traffic of military trucks coming and going in all directions. There were soldiers at every street corner busying themselves with different kinds of equipment. Officers were walking purposefully and were being stopped every so often by countless gendarmery patrols checking their papers. I noticed that they were stopping mostly officers seldom an ordinary soldier.

Our camp commandant in all his glory and size walked down the middle of the street flanked by the Rapportfurer and the executioner and we behind him surrounded by the guards. This however did not stop a couple of gendarmes to stop him and ask for papers, which he obliged with great fanfare saying in a loud voice and a dramatic wave with his hand in our

direction; And there are all my people, taking in with one sweep guard and guarded.

We are passing by a van around which a few gendarmes hang around. One of them decides to open the rear door. As the door opens, a pile of cartridge belts falls down to the ground. One of the gendarmes yells out to our guard: Here take some bullets. You will need them. One of our guards yells back: We have enough. A quarter of an hour later we leave that town behind. Shortly after we were driven into a barn where we fall down exhausted.

Where are they taking us? How much longer can we keep without food? After forty eight hours we can sit or lie and speak freely. Everybody comes up with his assumptions. Others come up with worthless plans. Somebody proposes to hide in that huge barn full of hay. The Germans have counted us as we were driven inside the barn and they are sure to count us in the morning. They will look for us, find us and shoot. What to do? Our chances of surviving are slim. Yet the Russians are so close and getting closer by the hour.

In the morning we are being counted and some are missing. A few SS men remain behind. What happened we do not know. When the SS men catch up too us, the barn is already out of sight and ear shot.

To avoid traffic, we are being led on a side road that runs through open fields. The wind blows through the blanket and penetrates every bone in the emaciated bodies. In spots the blowing wind deposit a lot of snow on the road which makes the going harder. The only part of my body that has not felt the bitter cold during the march so far were my feet. Suddenly I felt as if I stepped with a bare foot into a pile of snow. I pull my foot out of the snow and notice that the entire bottom of my shoe is gone.

This is all I need now, I think to myself. How long can I go on with a bare foot. (we had no socks.) I knew it was a matter of minutes. In desperation I ripped off a piece of blanket and wrapped it around my bare foot. Tearing off two more longer strips, I used them to fasten the first piece tighter and so I proceeded one foot in a shoe, the other wrapped in a rug.

At noon we got to a wider and better road. At first I did not notice it but there was a fair amount of traffic and all is moving in our direction. It consisted of people on foot. I start taking a better look and see people of all ages, men and women. Many with knapsacks on their shoulders. Others with suitcases. Some more pulling a small sleigh loaded as much as it will hold. Still others pushing a baby carriage piled high. Slowly my frozen mind starts to realize that they are Germans running from the Soviet onslaught.

I try to imagine how they must feel. Only a couple years ago they ruled over Europe, now they are reduced to homeless wanderers. Yet they do not awaken in me pity nor sympathy. They catch up to us but they are not in a hurry to overtake us, as if near us they feel safer.

We are pleased with their presence. Not only the middle aged air force guards but even the SS men behave properly in front of the German civilians. They not only stopped using their foul language on us and stopped the beatings, but what is more important, they stopped shooting those that can not continue the march. Instead they order some of us to help the weak ones to continue. With our experience we know that this is only a matter of a few more hours until we will be herded into some barn along the way while the civilians will continue. Then everything will return to the way it was. Still even a temporary respite is welcomed.

It is getting dark and we are marching. It is midnight and we are still plowing on. The night is bright. I can clearly see the faces of the civilains that walk along us and recognize some from this afternoon. How gladly I would change places with them even in defeat. My common sense tells me that our guards will be with us until the last one of us will collapse. They, the guards might be homeless for a little while but live they will.

Sometime past midnight we get off the main road and into a nearby large barn.

In the morning, after leaving behind a large number of dead that died during the night, we continue our march. This time on a very remote road that leads through small forest and snow covered fields. One would think that we are on a trip to discover new horizons as there was not a sign of a human being until suddenly we began to see dead bodies lying along the road side dressed in the stripped camp uniforms. What we could not tell was if they are a couple of hours ahead of us or a couple of days. We no longer needed road markers, their bodies indicated the direction in which they went and what lay ahead for us. That night again we spent in a barn and in the morning there were some missing. As we started marching away, some SS men began to search in the hay.

The last couple of days our guards lost every pretense of civility. If one fell down regardless if he tried to get up or not, he was dragged off the road and shot.

That afternoon another group of inmates caught up to us. They were about the size of our group. They were guarded exclusively by SS men, but what took us aback was the fact that their capos and Blockaltesters carried weapons and played with them like children with toys. Those camp bigshots

had green triangles (professional criminals) having for some reason gotten hold of fire arms they kept on shooting the inmates at will. That group somehow got mixed in with us and I have seen with my own eyes as one capo of that group shot three of their inmates in front of us and in front of their and our guards for no reason at all. In fact, he shot them in the back as they were marching. Our guards did not interfere with the others. In fact it seemed that they were oblivious to what is taken place around. The only conclusion we inmates could come to was that the SS guards came to a satanical agreement with the bigshots of that group, since those big shots were Germans and criminals, to dispose of the several hundred Jewish inmates and disappear in the confusion of the fast approaching front. Of course some ask the question as where did those big shot inmates get the weapon? To which others answered: From already deserted SS men.

The inmates of that group were so perturbed, so agitated and in such a terror that inspite of the half hours that we were marching practically together we did not exchange two words with any of them and did not find out what camp they were from.

As suddenly as they appeared, so have they disappeared. Their guards have driven them into a little forest. Their desperate gazes and the deep resignation on their faces are haunting me still.

Again that night we were driven into a large barn and continued in the morning. The hiding in the hay became a daily event. The guard used to start looking for hidden inmates as soon as we were driven outside, even before they started the count. We got used to the shooting of those found hidden as if that is how it supposed to be.

Every evening as soon as we used to be driven into the barn, I used to tighten the piece of blanket around my foot and retie the two strips of blanket for they used to slacken during the day. I could not do it during the day for I would have to step out of the line and bend down for such an act. An SS man would gladly shoot me. Besides, my hands were cold and my fingers so numb that I could not do anything with them. Already a couple days earlier when I had to urinate which was done during the march I was unable to button back the button of my fly and left it open. I buttoned my camp coat over my pant and continued. The next day I was unable already to button my coat and I was marching with an unbuttoned coat with the flaps skirts of my coat clapping in the wind. The only bit of protection from the wind was my shrunken blanket which I used piece by piece to wrap around my bare foot.

The following few days and nights were like walking in a night mare in which I could not discern between being alive or dead. No more was

anything of importance or interest. I no longer bothered to look back to see how many and who is being shot. I lost count of the dead nor did I remember the number of days we have been marching. I no longer felt hunger pangs nor thirst. I lost count of the days I ate my last piece of bread. I was surprised that I, we, are still alive.

It had to be around the twenty eight of January when we were driven out of a barn and lead down a field road for about two kilometers. We were marching through a large farm, passing by a couple large barns and stables. At the end of the farm near some sheds I noticed some freight wagons, their wide doors were open as if they are beckoning for us to get in. We are told to get in. In the confusion and bustle I notice near one shed some wooden boxes with raw potatoes. Not caring any more I left the line, ran over to a box and grabbed a handful of what turned out to be five potatoes and put them in my pocket.

Even now I do not know if it was an act of indifference to the consequences or was I in a state of delirium that I dared to do it. In any case, for what ever reason, I got away with it. The doors slid shut and padlocked. We remained in total darkness. Apparently they prepared enough wagons for our entire camp. As there were already so many of us missing or shall I say dead, there was enough room in each car for each one to sit on the floor. Although the wagons were unheated and the walls and floor were of ordinary boards, never the less, they broke the wind which accompanied us the last eleven days and cut our flesh like knives. We folded our blankets and sat on them. As our bony backsides were hurting from sitting on the wooden floor, it didn't take long before the cold penetrated our camp uniforms and we began to shiver. We decided to pair up. We used one blankets to sit on and wrap ourselves with the second.

After many hours the train begins to move. We do not know in which direction nor do we know what is going on outside. The walls of the cars are solid. There is a narrow crack between one side of the wall and the roof. Enough to tell if it is day or night but impossible to look out through it.

The train is a drag. Makes many stops. Some short ones and others long. We loose track of time. It gets difficult to differentiate the length of time between each stop nor the length of the stops themselves. It makes no difference anymore. When the train stops so dies the banging of the wheels. A dead silence overwhelms us. Slowly some start talking with low voices, not out of fear but for lack of strength. In our semi delirium we attempt to speculate on our next torment. Like: will they keep us here locked until we are all dead or are they taking us still to another camp? The conversation

leads to the subject of food. How long can we survive without food? It is already twelve days that we got nothing to eat. We have held out longer than I ever imagined possible. How much longer can it go on.

The topic turns to cannibalism. One mentions the liver is the most nourishing part of an animal and assumes that it is applicable to a human to. I look around in the almost complete darkness of the wagon and wonder: Whose liver will I be forced to eat, or will it be mine that will be eaten? Some one points to a couple bodies already lying motionless on the floor. A shiver goes through me and I turn my head away. At that moment I resolve no matter what, I will not eat human flesh. If somebody wants, let him wait and eat mine.

I see that nobody makes a move towards the two bodies. It seems after all that talk the thought of cannibalism is alien to our nature.

And so passed the first day and night.

With the break of day which we can tell by looking up to the crack above our heads, I eat one of the five raw potatoes in my pocket. It does not satisfy my hunger nor do I feel more hungry. The constant nagging hunger of the few days ago left me. I no longer felt hunger nor thirst.

The following four days was a confusion between reality, lucidity and delirium. We did not know where we were being taken nor did we care. Mentally we had already resigned from life. Still I used to eat one raw potato every morning. On the fifth day I finished my fifth and last potato.

That very day at noon our train stopped. By the voices outside, we could tell immediately that we arrived at our destination. A few minutes later the doors slid open and we were told to get out. How many remained in the wagons dead or dying we did not know. Those that could still stand up were lined up five abreast and ordered to march.

The road was up hill and I found it difficult to march. After several dozen meters I began to fall back. Two of my close acquaintances grabbed me under my arms and helped me walk. One of them by the name of Leibl Washkiewitch from the shtetl of Lomza, my age was holding me with powerful hands. I asked him where from can he muster so much strength to hold me up after not having eaten for over two weeks? To what he told me that while we were being loaded onto the train cars by some big shots, like the Blockaltesters and capos, he happened to enter with them in the same car. In several places where they made stops the local authorities brought some food for us inmates. Those big shots used to accept it in our behalf. Take it into their car and eat it themselves. Never sharing it with us. They had so much food they did not mind if he helped himself to some.

After several hundred meters walk uphill, there appeared before us a wall built of large rectangle stone blocks that gave the appearance of a fortress. I was too weak and too exhausted to care about further surprises or in fact what is going to happen to me. At that moment I did not realize that I am facing the gates of Mauthausen .

The large entrances of the camp opens up for us and we are being led in. Our guard remains outside. They do not follow us. We are under new authority. We are surrounded by new strange capos who are leading us between two large stone buildings. We remain between the two stone buildings a long time, when suddenly two large wooden crates full of sliced bread is brought to us. Each of us gets a slice of bread. The first piece of bread for me in two weeks and the first bide of food in sixteen days except for the five raw potatoes.

We are being counted several times and are told that out of the almost nine hundred that left Sosnowiec seventeen days ago, we are four hundred including all the big shots of which none perished of course. Those big shots included the camp altester, the blockaltesters, the capos, the office staff, cooks and their helpers. Some fifty men in all. All non Jews, who were not treated like we Jews during that march and were receiving food everyday. That leaves us only three hundred and fifty Jews that survived the march from Sosnowiec to Mauthausen.

By then we Jews have forgotten what day of the week it is or day of the month, until one of us asked one of the trustees for the date. The second of February came the answer. Something clicked in my mind. Somehow the date was registered in my memory, but then in the state I was in, barely aware of what is taking place around me, it hit me. I remembered that on the same day, the second of February two years ago, I arrived in Auschwitz. What a coincidence.

It turned out that we were next door to the bath house. We were ordered in and got undressed. Our hair was cut and with a blade, a stripe five centimeters wide was shaven in the middle of each head running across from front to the back. Like in Auschwitz here too, we were permitted to hold on to our belts and shoes. Those whose shoes were falling apart or lost a shoe like myself, received a pair of shoes that had a wooden bottom or sole, and cloth top.

After all this we were led into the shower room. I felt so weak that I sat down on the floor. I do not know if we got much cleaner as we had no soap. After some minutes under the showers we were driven into an adjoining

room where each of us received an undershirt and a pair of drawers. No pants, no jacket no coat.

As we were leaving the bath house we were registered. You gave your name, age, nationality and profession. Unlike Auschwitz where they tattooed your number, there they gave you a small piece of tin, two centimeters wide and six or seven long on which your number was impressed. I received number one hundred and twenty five thousand four hundred and sixty five. With it each received a short piece of wire to tie the number around the left wrist.

Dressed only in underwear we were led out that February the second into the wintery outdoors. After lining us up we were led through the camp whose buildings were made of stone blocks. They seemed to be built to last forever or for the thousand years Reich that Hitler promised his people. We entered a separate part of the camp where I saw a wooden barrack surrounded with a barbed wire fence and guard towers. Next to that barrack, there was another one just like the first one, but this one was not fenced in nor were there guard towers. We are led inside that barrack and ordered to sit down on the floor, and to spread out legs so another one can sit between us and spread his legs so the next one can get in. And so we were squeezed in one into the other taking up the entire floor. The barrack was completely empty of bunks except for a room in one corner in which the Blockaltester and his Stubendiensts had their accomodations.

It was late afternoon when we were packed in there and we were still sitting there in the evening. The one good thing is that it is warm when one leans against the other but it is difficult to sit. We were not allowed to move and the floor is hard and hurts the behind. With day light we were given permission to stand. Our overseers, the Stubendiensts are not Germans or Poles like in Auschwitz. They are Spaniards. Those inmates were supporters of the republic and were fighting against Franco when Franco took power they escaped to France who sympathized with them. However, when Hitler occupied France, they were arrested and sent to concentration camps as anti fascists and anti Nazis.

Here I would like to point out that during my short two weeks stay in Mauthausen I noticed that despite the fact that there were among the Spaniards capos and Stubendiensts, they did not manifest that inherent anti Semitism that was so prevalent in Auschwitz among Germans, Poles, Czechs or Russians.

That morning we each received a quarter bread and at noon the bowl of soup. It was only then that our hunger had awaken a new.

We remained in that barrack all day watching through the windows as all day long inmates were dragging bodies to the crematorium from the neighboring fenced in barrack. We found out that the neighboring barrack served as a bunker (penal barrack) in which inmates breaking the law in camp were held under inhumane conditions. The day before our arrival, the six hundred inmates in that barrack decided to break out. The result was that everyone of them was shot.

The second night in Mauthausen we tried to spend lying down. Surprisingly we succeeded thanks to a bit of ingenuity and above all, the sticks of the Stubendiensts. We were ordered to lie on our sides as close too each other as humanly possible.

In the morning we received the quarter of bread and the soup at noon. What we could not understand was the fact that we are not going out for the revellie, nor are we being counted indoors. This compounded with the fact that we are still in underwear created suspicions which turned to rumors that they are going to dispose (kill) of us. That same evening we received a whole loaf of bread. For the first time in the history of the camp, in any camp as far as I knew. This act really confused us. But the joy of holding an entire loaf of bread in our hand chased away any dark thought from one's mind.

Who can imagine the feeling of a proprietor of an entire loaf of bread. Not only during the years in camp did I not possess an entire loaf of bread but ever since we were driven out of our homes in Shershev, bread had become a luxury. After four years of constant hunger I was looking at the bread and could not believe that it is mine. The camp experience dictates to eat when you have and can. So we ate and to the last crumb.

Regarding the bread we heard all kinds of assumptions. The most reasonable was that the camp expected a large arrival of inmates from camps that are being transported deeper into Germany. However, that arrival or transport did not materialize due to the thousands that fell on the way like we. Their tortured bodies laying by the way-side indicating the direction too the Nazi concentration camps. We were eating their bread wondering when and who will eat our bread.

A couple days later we received pants and jackets and were transferred to another barrack which had already three tier bunks like those in Auschwitz. That barrack served as a transition barrack in which new inmates from other camps used to be brought in and others taken away daily to other camps around Mauthausen. On those bunks in Auschwitz we slept singly but here in Mauthausen we slept two and three on a single bunk. I remember one night four of us shared one bunk. Not only did we lay on a side we had to

lay with our heads in opposite directions, that is your neighbor's feet sticking in your face. In that barrack we became mixed with inmates from other camps with whom we had no prior contact except the fact that we were Jews and shared in thought the expected same final fate.

Once we received our outer clothing, that is pants and jackets, we had to show up to the appell (roll call). We also could move about in the camp, hoping to find something to eat.

Mauthausen at that time was over-flowing with inmates brought in from all the camps on the Polish territory including Auschwitz. Many were simply dragging themselves over the camp with one thought in mind: Find something to eat. Some volunteered to go to work hoping to find there something to eat. I was fortunate ones to be taken with a group to work in the kitchen. What could be better than to work in a kitchen I thought to myself. At least I will get a bowl of soup. We were led into a cellar where we saw some fifty Soviet war prisoners peeling potatoes. They were all invalids. Each was missing one or both legs. The mystery to me was that the Germans bothered to amputate their leg or legs what had to be done in a hospital, while at the same time they were shooting thousands of perfectly healthy Soviet prisoners. Something I saw with my own eyes.

They put us to peel potatoes. Slowly I worked my way closer to the Russian soldiers and the reason became clear to me. On their well worn uniforms, I noticed their ranks. The lowest rank was of a major.

Is it possible that the Nazis kept them as bargaining chips?

The bowl of soup I hoped too get did not materialize but I did succeed in slipping a few raw potatoes into my pocket which I ate on the way to the barrack I was not fortunate to be picked again for the kitchen.

In those days many transports of inmates used to arrive. Those were not people from the outside freshly arrested. Those were tired, hungry, emaciated, exhausted inmates from other camps which were being marched into Germany as the German army was retreating or rather falling back under the onslaught of the Red Army. Although the greater part of those inmates perished in those marches, the remnants were overflowing the remaining camps, creating a problem for the camp authorities.

During my short stay in Mauthausen one early evening a large transport of inmates arrived from Gross Rosen. If it really was from Gross Rosen, I am not sure, that was the rumor. Nobody was permitted to get close to them. They were let into the bath house and after the hot shower, they were driven stark naked outside where they remained over night. They stood there hugging the stone wall huddled together when we left them that early

evening. In the early morning when we went over to see them, only a handful were still on their feet but near collapsing. The rest were lying on the ground motionless. We were not permitted to watch them and were chased away. We were later told that there were twelve hundred men in that group. All perished in that mid February night of 1945.

Mauthausen, just like Auschwitz had its affiliated camps. The largest of them were the two camps Gusen one and Gusen two. Each held twelve thousand inmates a piece. In Mauthausen, they used to tell horrible stories about them. It was a known fact that each day five hundred inmates used to leave Mauthausen permanently for the two Gusen camps and as King Solomon said: "Al the rivers flow to the sea but the sea does not overflow." So was with those two Gusen camps. Between those two camps they used to "consume", to be more precise, they worked to death five hundred soouls in every twenty four hours.

The camp Mauthausen itself had horror legacies of its own that were known almost in all the concentraion camps in Germany. It was infamus for its stone quarry. I remember how a trustee, a gypsy inmate sitting on his bunk on the third tier in our barrack looking down on us said: You Jews think that you have it tough here, you should have been here in 1939 when they brought here Jews from Germany and Austria and were made too work in the quarry. When father and son holding hands used to jump down from the top, almost two hundred steps down into the abyss. Their bodies used to get torn at times to shreds from the sharp edges of the rocks below.

A day or two later, I happened to come across a group of the Strafkompany (penal colony) that worked at the quarry. They were led to a pile of stones where each had to pick up a stone, put it on his shoulder and carry it up all the way to the top, the entire two hundred steps, dump it and go down for more. They were not permitted to pick up a smaller stone but pick up the one in front of him. They were doing it twelve hours a day without rest.

One morning, in the middle of February, the block Schrreiber (block registrar) called out some numbers. Among them was mine. He took us to the appell square. There we were joined by many other groups until we were a group of about five hundred men. We were led out of the camp and marched on a side road. We were in farm country. Every couple hundred meters, we saw a farm house with a couple other buildings. The snow had began to melt and we could see in spots the black fertile soil. Nobody was looking out a window nor did anybody look at us passing by. The locals are used to seeing us inmates.

Suddenly we are among a few wooden barracks and in front of us is a wide high gate. We are already used to the sight of those gates. Never the less we are wondering what is behind them. We are led inside. Our escort of SS men remain behind and we are surrounded by a bunch of new overseers. The majority are Germans with green triangles. They recognize or are informed that they have another group of Jews, although on our triangles we have the letter "P" for Polish, but we have not yet gotten the yellow inverted triangle identifying us as Jews.

As the majority of us in Sosnowiec were Jews from Poland. When we received our pants and jackets, we received at that time our triangles and ordered to put on the initial of the country of birth on it. All of us put on the letter "P" for Poland. I, not knowing if our camp commandant has brought with him the archives, I was hoping to get by as a Russian who stood a better chance of surviving then a Jew, so I marked a letter "R" on my triangle.

The two weeks in Mauthausen nobody seemed to nootice or made a fuss over it and I was hoping that this "R" might be a remedy and a help in fooling the Nazis.

We are told that we are in Gusen "A" Our new overseers do not let us wait to find out who we are dealing with. They refer to us by our pure Jewish names, like Shloimkah, Yankelah, Moishelah, Berelah. They pronounce the names with a clear Yiddish accent but with so much cheap mockery and contempt that we immediately realize among what kind of Jew haters we find ourselves.

We are in the center of the camp, the appell square. A couple more big shots approach us. One with a list starts reading some names. One name sounds familiar, Rosen. I look arouond and see the former capo of D.A.W. in Auschwitz. The older Jew, the engineer and inventor who used to supervise the repairs of all the engines in the factory. Maybe the only capo that never raised his voice or hand against anybody. The one who used to gather a quorum for Jewish prayers every morning despite the danger. I have never had anything to do with that man nor did I ever speak to him,but when I saw him suddenly in that hell, I felt as if I saw a long lost friend.

They led away those half a dozen or so men and started to break us up into smaller groups and assign us to different barracks. I, among a group of about fifty was assigned to block (barrack) 15. Half of the fifty were from Sosnowiec camp. All acquaintances and to some extended friends.

The barrack I was assigned to was in a corner of the camp. There was one more barrack behind us , number 16. That barrack, number 16 was as of late taken up by German inmates, professional criminals, who have recently

volunteered to join the army. The Germans were at that time so short of men, that they were willing to over look their crimes as long as they volunteered to serve in the army.

Those criminals already half free, were dressed in the African corps uniforms in which the German army had no need anymore. The African corps ceased to exist with the German defeat in Africa. Those half inmates, half free people were hardened criminals who became foremen, capos and even Blockaltesters (block elders) in camp. Because they co-operated with the SS by doing their dirty work, they used to go out of the camp for training and gymnastics. Of course they received better food and conducted themselves more arrogantly than before.

Our barrack although wooden was a bit better than the Birkenau ones, the so called "Pferdestallbaraken." (horse barracks). This barrack consisted of two "stubes" (rooms). In between the two rooms, was the entrances to the barrack and a separate room for the Blockaltester. The Blockaltester (block elder), a tall slim German with a green triangles was earlier the Lageraltester (camp elder) but was demoted to Blockaltester for some transgression. His legacy of a murderer was no secret and followed him everywhere.

Our group was led into one room which was full with three tier Auschwitz style bunks. Unlike Auschwitz, where we slept singly, we were paired unto two per bunk. My partner was a boy, my age who was with me in Sosnowiec, Henry Czesielski (pr Tsheshelsky). He came fairly late to Auschwitz but spent four years in labor camps prior to Auschwitz. We were the first Jews in that barrack. Besides us, there were another fifty inmates in that room mostly Rusians. The Stubendienst (room elder) was a twenty five year old Ukrainian from former east Poland, a raving anti semite.

We did not receive any food that day. When I lay down the bunk, I was surprised to find so much room and thought to myself: Here we are, two grown men on a sixty centimeter wide bunk and we could find room for one more

The gong woke us at four thirty. The lavatories were in a small adjoining building. As I got in there, I noticed in the right corner, a large wooden barrel the height of a man. One had to stand on his tip toes in order to look inside and all older or earlier inmates did look in right after they came in. I became curious myself and looked in. For a moment all I could see was water almost to the rim. A closer look exposed a pair of shoes swimming upside down in the water. Looking closer I noticed a pair of legs leading downwards. The first thought that came in mind was that the man committed suicide. Turning to the closest person to me, a Russian inmate, I said too

him: He must have had enough. The Russian looked at me as if to say: Do not be such a fool. But quietly said: they drowned him. There was no time for questions. I ran back to the stube to get my quarter of bread and ran outside for the roll call. Right after the roll call, we were lined up and marched out of the camp together with all the inmates.

We did not march far when I noticed at a distance of three quarters of a kilometers, a long row of barracks in which direction we were going.

As soon as we got there the entire column dispersed into the barracks. We, the new comers remained alone. A few SS men appeared with some overseers. They called out our numbers and assigned us to the different barracks. I was led into a wooden barrack not wider than those in Birkenau but much much longer. Along the two walls of the barracks were lined up turning lathes each operated by a single man. Every ten or twelve lathes formed a separate unit that performs a specific task. Over each group there was an appointed supervisor which is called Einsteller (adjuster) whose job it is to make sure that the cutting blades on the lathes are placed properly. The lathes are very automated and the operator does not have to be an expert. His job is to put in the piece of metal, secure it properly in its proper place, check the cutting knives to make sure they are not dull and push a button. The machine does the rest. When finished, he takes out that part, checks for the correct measurement and puts it on a specially designed wagon. When the wagon is half full, it is taken to the next section. The Einsteller (adjuster) has to know about a lathe, must know how and where to fasten the cutting knives so as they should cut just the right amount of metal.

My Einsteller is a young Russian, my age. He noticed the letter "R" on my triangle and takes me for a Russian and in no time we became friends. Our capo is a Lithuanian. The first and only Lithuanian I ever met in the concentration camp. He is friendly to the Russians but hates Jews. He speaks well Russian and German. He is polite taking me for a Russian.

At noon we got our soup. With the work I have no problem. I do not even need the Einsteller (adjuster) to adjust the knives. Just the same he comes over for a chat. I was eager to speak with him. He has been there some time and knew the camp. From him I could learn something. He too wanted to speak with me to find out abut other camps. He wanted to know all he could. Of course I had to fulfull my norm of work, but I knew I can doo it and so did he. I found out that all the twelve thousand inmates in this camp, Gusin "A" are working in this factory and producing six hundred light machine guns every twenty four hours. The factory consisted of a row of wooden barracks and in each barrack a different part of the machine gun was being

made. In our barrack we were making the gun barrels which by then I have already figured out by myself. He told me that if a worker does not fulfill his norm, he is hung right on the spot in the factory. The execution is conducted under the supervision of the "Ubercapo (head capo) who is nick-named the "General". That was a German inmate with a green (criminal) triangle. He was feared by the inmates even more than the fear of the S.S.

From this young Russian Einsteller, I found out about the unspoken phantom of Gusin. It consisted of the group or "commando" fireman. This was a group of hardened German criminals sentenced to life or long terms who had to make the camp their home for a long time. Those people without principles or morals once in jail realized that it is better for them to be on the side of the oppressor than the oppressed and collaborated with the SS fully. As there were no fires in camp, as a sport, they used to wander around the lavatories at night and if they found in there a lone inmate, they used to drown him in the hugh barrel of water that was in every lavatory.

When I heard it, it became clear to me the event of the first morning in our lavatory.

At six we finished work. According to camp regulations, we lined up five abreast and marched off to the camp. At the wide camp gate we are being counted and as we are inside we disperse to our barrack to line up for the appell. We get nothing to eat, not even the so called "Tea". I have nothing to do so I go to explore the camp. The entire camp consists of woooden barracks except a large store house and the kitchen, which are both built of bricks and stone. There is a bath house, a Krankenbau (camp hospital), and the inevitable crematorium. I also came across a couple firemen swaggering in their fancy uniforms with more arrogance on their well fed faces than the SS.

If my previous camps had on them the obvious sign or stamp of hunger, Gusen "A" deserved top prize. This I noticed immediately from my over two years camp experience. Returning back to the barrack, I took a better look around at the room and my room mates. Half the room mates were Jews that came with me. A few Poles, a few Frenchmen, few Dutch and a few Belgians. All of them were receiving parcels from home until recently. Now they were waiting impatiently for the defeat of Germany. They were just starting to feel hungry as their parcels had dried up. Their homes now liberated, beyond Nazi reach. The only others besides Jews that were not receiving parcels were the Russians. They were in Gusen already some time and some of them succeeded in finding some kind of niche in the camp

system by which they managed to procure some extra food and even help out a friend.

One had to admire their desire, their ardor for living. Their talent to improvise and ability to make do. To a degree I would say they were very fool-hardy when it came to procuring some food. Their reckless behaviour which brought on inhumane and terrible punishment I saw a short time later.

A Russian teenager stole from another one of the same age a piece of bread. The wronged Russian denounced him to the Blockaltesten. We were awakened in the middle of the day as at that time we worked night shift. We lined up in a line and the Blockaltester said to us: You will now witness the punishment for stealing bread. Turning to the young thief, he said: Do you have any friends you would like to say good-bye to, for you are going to die.

None of us took his words seriously and I doubt if the young Russian did. Still he shook hands with the few Russians in our Stube (room). The Blockaltester with the Stubendiensts, that Ukrainian anti semite tied his hands behind him and led him to the lavatory as we were following. They led him to the large barrel filled with water. The Bloockaltester with the help of the Stubendienst lifted him up and with the head first, they threw him into the barrel. I was not to close to the barrel, but when I saw his body going over the rim, I turned away. I do not even know when his body was taken out and away.

So far we Jews walked around with our red triangles and letter "P" on it, which identified us as Polish political prisoners and I with the letter "R" being taken for a Russian by those who did not know me personally. Some dozen days after my arrival during the mid day break when we were receiving our watery soup, I noticed some Russian inmates carrying bowls with soup. I noticed the direction they were coming from and let myself go there.

I entered a small stall and saw in the middle of the floor a barrel with thick noodle soup around which a few Russians stood. To the side there was a short line of Russians forming. One of the Russians near the barrel has a ladle in his hand and is dishing out the soup to each of them while another is writing down the recipients number. Desperate for food, I get in line. When my next comes, the one that marks down the number, not knowing me, asks me where I work. With a nod of my head I point to the barrack. He writes down my number and I receive a liter of noodle soup thick as if cooked without water. The one that wrote my number down says to me: Remember to bring the two cigarettes tomorrow. I assure him that I will. Eating the soup I am trying to figure out how those Russians managed to swipe a barrel

of such good soup for it certainly was not for us inmates. It had to be for the SS.

The bowl of sup did not satisfy my hunger but I was pleased with the unexpected treat. As far as payment goes, I never had cigarettes nor did I ever see those Russians again.

Some days later as our "Einsteller" (blade adjuster) was adjusting the blades of the lathe, he cut off a finger and was taken to the camp hospital. Our capo, the Lithuanian anti semite comes over to me and appoints me as the blade adjuster. He tells me that it is my job and duty to make sure that the blades on the lathes are properly adjusted and the lathes are always in working condition. Somebody else takes over my lathe and I assume my new job. I think to myself would that anti semite capo appoint me blade adjuster if he had known that I am a Jew.

As I can now move about I can admire how well the work is organized. How raw material is delivered to each lathe and taken away to be delivered to the next lathe for the next operation. How good and fast weapons are being produced by starving prisoners. The some fifteen lathes under my responsibility are producing machine gun barrels. The first lathe gets a piece of rusty steel some sixty centimeters long and less than five centimeters thick. Through it there is a barely noticeably hole. By the time this piece of rusty steel passes through all the fifteen lathes in my department, the final product is a brand new shiny machine gun barrel. Nobody stays over you to rush you nor are those that work at the lathes being beaten. We all know what is awaiting us if we do not fulfill the norm. In contrast those that work in the so called transport column, those that haul the raw material all day long are constantly chased and beaten. They use to fall by the dozen daily. I used to see them bringing in the heavy rusty metal all day long and think of my work on the Holtz-Platz (timber yard) in D.A.W. in Auschwitz.

At noon we get the liter thin soup which I swallow in a minute. After everyone gets his soup, the capo calls the blade adjuster for seconds. I stand the last in line unsure if I qualify or not. The Lithuanian capo make no fuss and pours me another liter. I do not believe it. It is too good to be true and wonder how long my luck can last. For the hunger takes its toll continuously, even among those that work at the lathes, the mortality due to starvation is immense.

In my group the majority of the workers on the lathes were Jews Most of them from my stube (room). I could not see it so much on myself but I could see it on them. How they were being spent, literally burning out. Coming to the barrack after a twelve hour day, our Ukrainian Stubendienst used to

punish us for not making our bunk straight enough. He mercilessly used a piece of thick cable over our shoulders and back and backside. I too was priviledge to be treated by him a couple of times. It used to leave marks for weeks.

Putting in a twelve hour work day on a quarter a loaf of bread and a liter of watery soup a day, how long can a tired and exhausted human being go on? Is it then surprising that the mortality was so immense? The fear of not fulfilling the norm was great and many used to become panicky if they were falling behind with their work. When I worked on the lathe I had no such problem. My training at school in Brest-Litowsk and my experience in Sosnowiec camp came in handy. Others however, found it difficult. Quite often I used to leave my place and go over to the next guy to help him catch up. The Russian "Einsteller" (blade adjuster) used to tolerate it. Now that I was the "Einsteller", I was free to do with my time whatever I found necessary as long as it did not interfere with the gun barrel production and all lathes were operating. So I will now say with a little pride that at times I did help my friends and brothers in need with their work, as that was the only thing I was in position to do for them. With one of them I spent a year after liberation in Southern Italy in a refugee camp called Santa Marina Di Leuca. There, at any occasion he used to say to me : Moniek (the name the Polish Jews gave me) you saved my life many times in Gusin. I did not feel that I was doing such a great deed when I was doing it nor when he used to remind me after the war. But now, over half a century later, it feels good to know what I have done.

As I said earlier, it was too good to last. I am referring to the extra liter soup. An order was issued in the camp that all Jews have to put a yellow stripe above their red triangles. The next day at work nothing seemed to have changed. At noon we lined up for our soup. I get my soup and drink it quickly to be ready for when they will call the "Einstellers." They call and I am in line. My next comes. The Lithuanian capo takes a look at me, sees the yellow stripe and says; You do not get extra soup. You are only a temporary "Einsteller." I leave the line heart broken. The extra liter soup kept me going, at least for the time being. Now it is a question of weeks before I collapse like so many before me.

It is April. The snow is gone and it is warm in the sun. Every couple days new workers from other camps arrive to replace the departed. In my place comes a Pole, a former capo from some camp. A well fed young man. He has no inkling of what is going on here, but he is a former capo and a Pole to add. He gets the extra bowl of soup and I do the work. His work.

It is a sunny afternoon. From nowhere, suddenly sires start to wail. All motors stop and the capos yell; Run to the air shelters. I run with everybody else not knowing where. We run through fences, over green grassy ground to the nearby hills. I see holes in the hills like caves in which we were driven in. Inside I see long corridors in which prisoners are working. They are using pneumatic drills, others pneumatic chisels with which they are slicing away chunks from the stone walls and ceiling making the tunnels wider and longer. The part that I can see is roomy enough to take in our entire factory. Sure enough, inside tunnels are lined up with different machines. Some just standing there as if temporary. Others are already sitting in cement and connected with electric wires to some-where as if all they need is to push a button.

While still in Mathausen I knew that every day inmates are being taken to the nearby towns to clean up after the frequent allied bombardments. We all knew that Germany's industry is being destroyed from the air. As I was looking at the maze of tunnels under the mountain, I was over-whelmed at the Nazi accomplishment in digging themselves underground in order to protect their war industry. At that moment I was concerned with the inability of the allies to destroy it.

The alarm did not last more than half an hour and we started to return to the factory. A distance of two kilometers. To get there we had to run. On the way back we walked. I had no more strength to run and apparently neither did others. As we were walking back I noticed among the young grass, a scattered clover leaf which I used to pinch off and put into my mouth.

For me it was the first air raid in Gusin, but certainly not the last. It started repeating itself several times a week. The running became more difficult each time. Yet for all those alarms, I have not heard a single explosion in or around the camp. It was for me a great puzzle why the allied planes do not bombard the wooden barracks that stood no more than ten meters apart and produced six hundred machine guns every twenty four hours. One bomb could have incinerated the bone dry barracks that would burn like sulphur.

That the situation for the Germans was getting worse, we could tell by constantly occurring shortages of raw material. The twelve hour shifts were shortened to eight. That is we started working from six in the morning to two in the afternoon and the second shift from two in the afternoon to ten in the evening. The factory used to stay idle at night, for the first time. Even the thin soup became thinner. There was nothing to put in it. The distribution of the soup that used to take place at work was now taking place in the barrack.

The morning shift that used to start work at six A.M. received its soup upon returning from work. That is about three P.M. The evening shift that used to start at 2 P.M. used to get its soup at noon.

The distribution of the soup used to be done by the Blockaltester (block elder). We used to line up in a single line each with a bowl in hand and the Blockaltester, with a ladle in his hand used to dish out a full dipper a liter of soup as we approached the barrel. When the soup lately became so thin, we started to manipulate for a better position at the barrel. It meant to be either in the first few as something might float on top and the distributor might fish it out and you will be the lucky one to get it, or one of the last ones as maybe there is something on the bottom.

The irony of all this way that we, ordinary inmates, were literally dying of hunger while our Blockaltester used to walk around in the barrack drunk. It is difficult to understand or even imagine such a contradiction (or ambiguity) but this was the reality of the concentration camp.

About ten days or so in April a rumor spread like wild-fire over the camp that the six hundred sick inmates in the Krankenbau (camp hospital) have been gased. As there was no gas chamber in Gusin the SS ordered to board over the windows and doors and make the hospital air tight leaving a small opening for a can of gas. The result was that all the six hundred patients died. What was however surprising was the fact that the majority were non Jews. They consisted mostly of Russians, a few Poles, Frenchmen, Dutch, Spandiards and there was talk about a couple of Germans.

After this was confirmed, we Jews lost completely the last shred of hope. If they can do it to Non Jews, what chance of getting out alive do we have? In such a mood we lay down, get up and go to work. A couple days later as we come from work dejected, depressed but still with the constant hunger, we line up for the liter of liquid called soup. As soon as the Blockaltester opens the barrel and dips the ladle we start jockeying for a better place in the line. The Blockaltester lifting his eyes from the barrel says; You stupid Jews. What are you pushing each other for. I have received orders that as soon as the other shift returns from work tonight, I am to take you all to the Krankenbau (camp hospital) where all the Jews in camp will be gassed.

So, I think to myself, this is the end. It should not come as a surprise. I knew it all along that this is how it will end. But from knowing until the moment it arrives, is a different story. We do not push each other any more. We take the bowl of soup with indifference knowing that this is the last meal that any of us will ever have.

As if to confirm what we just heard, two capos walk by. One opens the door and yells in "Lagersperre". That means that nobody is allowed outside. We cannot even go out to confirm with Jews from other blocks what we have just heard. The Ukrainian Stubendients hammers down a couple loose boards in the floor. I think to myself. How foolish of him. What Jew would be stupid enough to try to hide under the floor in front of a hundred people and what good would it do him.?

I get up on my bunk. My partner to the bunk works in the other shift and I envy him. The fact that he does not know yet the terrible news and is spared the last agonizing hours. I sink in my thoughts and go through all the suffering. All the agony of the last years, especially the over two years in Auschwitz. To have suffered so much. So much. Who could recount all the suffering that I went through. Every minute. Every agonizing day. The hurt, the beattings, the hunger, the hopelessness, the despair, the anguish. I felt so much remorse, so much regret for having slaved so much, for all the torment, the torture, the drudgery that I had to go through. For what? So I can die a couple days before liberation?

I suddenly felt a terrible regret. A heart rending remorse for not going together with my parents. That memorable Saturday morning, January 30/43. When they all, my parents, sisters and brother, were taken by sled to the rail way station. Instead I chose to remain another night in the ghetto to try to get out. Deep down I knew that if I did not succeed three consecutive nights to get out, how will I make it in the fourth, the last? I could have spent two more days. The two days in the cattle cars with my parents and help them with the children; my sisters and brother, in their final and agonizing moments of their lives.

How can I describe how and what I felt then? How can anybody? Is it humanly possible to recall the dark thoughts that went through my mind then?

It was a long wait till ten o'clock. I fell asleep. In all the dreams I ever dreamed in the camps I never dreamt about the future. It was always the past or the present. Now, a couple hours before I leave this world, I was having an extra ordinary dream. I was standing somewhere near rail way tracks and I see a train passing by very slowly. The train is full with passengers. In fact it is so crowded that some are sitting on top of the train. Others stick half way out the windows and doors. The passengers are dressed in civilian clothes and are waving to me. I recognize many of them. Jews from France that were with me in the same stube (room) in Auschwitz. Others that were with me in Sosnowiec and still others that I met right here in Gusin. I call out

to them: Where are you going? And they reply: To Switzerland. I woke up. What a sweet dream and what a bitter reality. Again arises in me the question. In fact it never left me: Why? Every Jew in the room is either sitting or lying on his bunk absorbed in his thoughts. Hardly anybody says a word. If yes, it is a whisper. I do not feel like talking. What can anybody tell me except to depict his and mine last moments. If somebody's imagination is richer than mine, he will make it more gruesome than I can imagine. The time drags and yet passes too fast. The minutes are long but the hours very short. I wish it was in my power to stop all the clocks in the world, so that ten o'clock will never come.

It is nine o'clock. In another hour the second shift will be back. I know that we are not the only ones, that the Germans have decided to get rid of every Jew under their jurisdiction and intend to accomplish it. Is it possible that there will be no Jews left in Europe? I lie down and listen to outside sounds I wonder, do miracles still happen?

I hear the shuffle of feet. The treading of shoes. They are here. Holding my breath, I am waiting for the Blockaltester's command to fall in. He most likely wants to have his fun and is letting us stew. Slowly I raise my head and look around. I do not see him and the just arrived tired workers go strait to their bunks and lie down. I ask my partner of the bunk Czesielsky, if he heard the news. He says no. He is too tired for conversation. I am not sure if he heard me. In a minute, he is asleep.

I lie on the bunk. An hour or two later, I fall asleep. I am awakened by the gong. It is four thirty. I do not believe I am still alive. We come to the conclusion that the Blockaltester, the drunkard, played a callous joke on us.

One can feel or smell in the air the approaching end of the war. Some inmates that go to work daily on the main road tell of heavy military traffic and frequent air attacks on them.

Our soup gets even worse and we get an eighth of a loaf of brad instead of a quarter.

In mid April, French, Belgian, Dutch and Danish inmates are collected, but not of the Jewish fate, and are taken away. Rumor had it that they were being sent to Switzerland. With that lot, went one French Jewish young inmate that was with me in the same stube (room) in Auschwitz. He was with me in Sosnowiec and came with me to Mauthausen and finally to Gusen. How he managed to get in that group is a mystery to me.

We start realizing that slowly the non Jewish inmates are being treated differently than the Jews, particularly those from western Europe. What

remained in camp were some German criminals, the majority of whom were being trained as soldiers. The others were Poles, Russians and Jews.

A few days after the departure of the western European inmates, right after the morning appell (roll call), as we were getting ready to go to work, we Jewish inmates are told to go back into the barrack as we will not be working today. Immediately the question arose: Is it what the Blockaltester mentioned some days earlier about taking us to the bath house to be gassed? When all the work columns left the camp for the factory, our Blockaltester comes in and announces that we Jews will soon be going to the camp canteen for parcels from the international Red Cross. He tells us to pair up and that one in each pair shall take with him a soup bowl.

We listen in astonishment. What new trick is this? He already told us that we will be gassed. We were ready then and ready now. What for is this kind of deceit? Will the red camp bowl calm us? Behind the window we see Blockaltesters, capos, foreman and other kinds of over seers are gathering on mass. Each with a heavy club in his hand. Now we know that they will lead us to the bath house, but why all this tumult, this agitation. We Jews know how to go to the gas chambers.

About eight o'clock walks in the Blockaltester. We stay in twos as ordered. He tells us to follow him. As we start coming out of the barrack we expected the clubs to start fall on us. But no. The Blockaltester walks calmly and we follow with the overseers all around us. They do not act hostile toward us as their usual style is. We are going in the directiooon of the canteen. At the entrance to the canteen stand two overseers. They tell one of the first two men to take off his jacket and they let the two men in. A minute later the two appear at the door with beaming faces. One is holding the red camp bowl which is now almost full with some kind of meat. The other has his arms around his bulging jacket which he is carefully carrying. We start going in two at a time coming out with so to speak loaded arms and lining up two in a row. My partner is Leibl Waszkiewicz. We walk into a large room. Half way across the room is a counter behind which stand a few overseers and some SS men. One inmate brings out from behind a wall a tin. Opening it with a can opener, he dumps the contents into the red bowl. I see solid chunks of meat. The other with a knife opens a sealed carton and dumps its contents onto my jacket which is spread out on the counter. I do not believe my eyes. In front of me is a heap of biscuits, marmalade in plastic bags, cubes of sugar, a couple tins, packages with cigarettes, tins of sardines and even chocolate bars. The SS men grab from the top of the heap the chocolate, sardines, cigarettes but do not bother to look for it inside. One of

the SS men says get going. I grab the jacket and ran out. Outside we joined the others who are staying in pairs. One is holding the red camp bowl with the meat, the other a jacket full of goodies. All the trustees that have accompanied us from the barracks are still around us with their clubs in hand very alert as if ready for action. We cannot make sense of it all. Are they going to lead us to be gassed and those parcels are only to mislead us?

It does not take long and we are back all together. In pairs we are following our Blockaltester and our escort is all around us. We are just passing by the first barrack after the canteen when a dozen or so Russian inmates run out from behind that barrack throwing themselves on a few of us knocking their jackets out of their hands with the goodies that scatter all over the paved ground. The Russians are throwing themselves on it like starving animals. (Who knows better than us what hunger is?) Our escort starts clobbering them indiscriminately. The few wronged inmates pick up whatever the Russians did not succeed in grabbing and we continue going. The same thing happens as we pass the next block and the next all the way to our barrack. Now I understand why the camp administration sent with us such a feared escort. If not for them we would have returned to the barrck with nothing.

The whole thing seems strange. Our escort consists of Blockaltesters and capos. The very same that until now have beaten us, tortured us, and killed us are now walking along with us to protect us. We are still inside the camp. Jew condemned to die, and they, the hardened German criminals with their arm bands and heavy clubs. It is just as easy for them to deliver a blow to a Jewish head as they are now doing to a Russian head. What is happening here?

We reach our barrack no. 15. Not the hospital for gassing. Our escort remains outside and disperses. We get onto our bunks to divide our just acquired treasure.

My partner, Leibl Waszkiewicz and I get on my bunk. (my bunk partner Czesielski has another closer friend with whom he shares his loot on his friend's bunk.) We open my jacket and find items I have forgotten existed. Besides the biscuits, we have sugar cubes, marmalade, a can condensed sweet milk sugar and four packages with twenty cigarettes in each. We each take two packages of cigarettes, a cigarette is worth a liter of soup. Even if it is only boiled water and a few dried tiny pieces of turnips swimming in it.

We eat everything and look around as everybody else is eating. At three o'clock the first shift will come from work. If they will not try to take

whatever we have left right away, they will try it at night. In whichever camp we are, we are always the down trodden and everybody's bullies us.

After drinking the thick sweet milk we start the bully-beef. After it came the biscuits, marmalade, ovalmaltin. We do not leave anything. The safest place is in your stomach. One is surprised how much a stomach can hold. All I have left are a few cubes of sugar which I keep in one pocket and the two packs of cigarettes in the other.

Those parcels gave us encouragement to go on living. Something that in reality we did not dare to do.

In the morning we noticed the price we paid for those parcels. If not half of us at least a third could not get out of their bunks. They too were afraid to leave any food and finished it all. With sadness and indeed with pain, we, the younger and healthier, watched as those whose stomachs and intestines ruined by years of hunger, starvation and lack of proper nutrition, succumbed to normal food. Unable to cope anymore with what is considered decent food, within three days, they all expired.

I do not want here to minimize the importance of those parcels. Without question they sustained the lives of many of us. Maybe even mine. They gave us the impetus to hold onto life at the most difficult time in camp. It was the first time since we have been confronted with Nazism, that we saw a sign that someone or some people, somewhere, care about us or even think about us.

The work in the factory went on despite the shortages of material and the critical situation on the front. The shortage of food in Germany was reflected in the camp where they started to divide a loaf of bread between twenty inmates.

Still we continued to run to the shelter when allied planes used to fly by. When air raid warnings used to take place in the camp, there was nowhere to run. As of recently, the allied flyers became so daring that they flew low enough that we could see their faces. One day the allied planes shot and killed many horses on a road parallel to the camp a couple kilometers away. The butchers from the nearby villages cut the bony parts like the lower legs nobody wanted, so they gave it to the camp. There was no meat on the bones, so they chopped the bone up and used it in the soup. As the Blockaltester was dishing out the soup, it was my good fortune to get not much soup. Instead an entire horse's knee. True, the knee took up the entire dipper. As I said, there hardly was any soup and of course no meat but there was a yellow jelly like substances between the joint that to me the starving

skeleton tasted delicious. Right there and then I made myself a promise that should I get out alive, I will cook myself a horse's leg.....

The next day we went back to the usual boiled water with a few tiny pieces of dried turnip floating in it that was called soup. Still I succeeded in finding a barrack in which some Russian inmates used to manage to steal a barrel of soup everyday and sell it for cigarettes. The going price was two cigarettes for a liter of soup. True, there was not much to the soup....

Despite the obvious signs that the war is drawing to an end, the camp discipline did not slacken by one iota. It was strict as if the Germans were the victors. It was still imposed by the SS and their accomplices, the overseers like the Blockaltesters, capos and their cronies. This fact enraged the inmates who felt that in the final days of the war and certain defeat of Germany, those criminals should have tried to atone for their conduct up to now.

I am not sure if it was the first or second of May, about three in the afternoon, we had just received the bowl of boiled water that they tried to pass for soup, when a couple of SS men walk into the barrak. Without even looking at us, they go over to the wall on which a blackboard was nailed on. The blackboard was covered with all kinds of warnings concerning the behavior of the inmates. All those warnings ended with those words "Will be shot." The two SS men tore off all those warnings, stuffed them in a bag and left.

Their action created a topic for conversation and assumptions. It also sneaked into us a spark of hope that we might, just might live to see the liberation. Thursday, May the 3rd, we worked, but the work proceeded sluggishly. The next day, Friday, May 4th, we went to work as usual six in the morning. But it became clear at the outset that it is not an ordinary day. The motors and lathes were running, but we walked among them talking to one another. The capos pretended not to see. Somewhere between ten and eleven before noon, I leave my lathe and go out to have a look outside. I lean on the barrack wall next to the door in case an SS man appears, I would be able to sneak back in. It is a sunny beautiful day and the warm sun warms the emaciated body. I relax for a moment and let my guard down. Suddenly I notice two SS men passing by me. It is too late for me to get back into the factory barrack. They look at me and smile as they go by. They are so close I can touch them. They wear no caps and their dark blond hair is messed up by the wind. I note that their jackets have no epaulets and the collars are missing the SS insignias. Never the less, it was obvious that they were missing, as the color of the cloth where the insignias were, was fresh.

That was the firs time that I saw an SS man smiling to a Jew without the mocking expression. Even to me the pessimist, the German defeat is obvious. Will they let us see it?

At two o'clock we line up and go to the camp. We find in our barrack the second shift which was supposed to be at work already. They did not go. The barrack is full with rumors.

After the appell, nobody goes back to the barrack. We are going to others. Maybe they know more.

Behind the camp is a grass and shrub overgrown hill. Two, or three hundred meters high. We look as soldiers are digging in a cannon and shortly after they start shooting over the hill to the farther side. At eight thirty we are back in our barrack and go to sleep, but sleep does not come easy. The cannon shoots continuously, but what is more, the mood is tense.

About ten at night, the door suddenly opens and in come several well dressed an well fed inmates. They tell us to wake each other up. They are Poles and Germans all with red triangles, political internees. They tell us that the war is coming to an end, but so far we are under German jurisdiction. We are to pick a few strong men to stay on guard all night. Should an SS man come into the barrack, we should throw him out. Should he try to shoot, we should kill him. In any case, we shall resist.

Did I ever dream to hear such words in camp? I can not even visualize that we should be able to hit back an SS man. I can not even grasp such a moment. Still I hear such words from the mouths of prominent inmates. By their attire, they were themselves overseers of sorts. They leave us making sure that by us appointed guards have something in their hands to defend themselves, like a club, an ax, a hammer, even a stone. Anything.

It is quiet in the barrack but the shooting goes on. Shortly after midnight we hear a powerful explosion. We run to the windows and see that on the spot where the cannon was, a huge fire is burning. The experienced among us say apparently the Germans themselves blew up the cannon and now the ammunition is burning. The fire burned a long time but the shooting stopped.

The gong woke us the usual time, four thirty in the morning. We fall in for the appell to be counted. It is five o'clock but nobody mentions the word work. We receive a thin slice of bread, our daily bread ration and hang out around the barrack for a while. Slowly we start drifting further away. The camp is full of inmates. Everyone is excited but tense. People keep on asking one another if he heard something. The others do not know more than you, but there is no shortage of assumptions, conjecturers or plain guessing.

With some friends we take a walk over the camp. Here is the bath house to which we were led a couple of times, where we stood under the showers and our anti semetic Stubendienst that Ukrainian "Stasiek" kept on yelling and hitting us while we were in there. It was here after the shower not having towels to dry ourselves, we had to put on our dirty underwear which we have just taken off. A short distance away is the "Krankenbau" (camp hospital) in which six hundred men have recently been gassed. The windows are still boarded up since that time but the doors are ajar. We do not want to go in there. A few steps further is the crematorium where a couple hundred bodies were burned daily. We pass barracks in which a Jew would not dare enter. They housed the prominent inmates, the big shots. Interesting that they are not visible now. They, that were everywhere, those well fed faces with the sticks in their hands. Now the camp is full of muselmanner and half muselmanner. The prisoners, reminiscent of skeletons, emaciated, exhausted, dejected carricutures of human beings. I look around and see many Jews but also many Russian prisoners. We Jews look much worse than they. I am not surprised. We Jews have just gone through an ordeal that for some started when leaving Auschwitz and was still going on. The Russians, however, have not known any other camp but this one and many found their niche in its system. True this camp was no summer camp, but they had it better than the Jews. The Polish inmates in general looked much better than we or the Russian prisoners.

No SS man is seen in the camp. The only Germans in camp are the inmates, former Blockaltester, capos and Vorarbeiter (foremen) who are now walking around in their African corps uniforms and are very much visible among us.

In mid afternoon we hear screams. I look around and see a group of prisoners on a roof of one of our camp barracks. They scream and point in the direction of Gusin "Two" or "B". I knew of Gusin Two which had a reputation as being worse than Gusin One, if such a thing was possible. The crowd of inmates start climbing on the roofs of the barracks. When I got there, all I could see was the camp itself about a kilometer away. Apparently the first group on the roof saw a column of tanks near Gusin "Two" and came too the conclusion that they were American.

At about five in the afternoon, the Blockaltester starts getting us ready for the appell. Somehow it takes him longer today. The first two lines are in place but the couple lines behind are restless and do not stay propertly. The Blockaltester and his Stubendiensts yell commands and they almost get us all in line. Suddenlt those closest to the exit from between our and the next

block start breaking lines and all lines fall apart. The closest to the exit start running. Others follow them and before anything, we are all running.

I run with the crowd not knowing where and why. People run from every barrack in the direction of the "Appell Platz", the main reveille square which is right in front of the wide gate, the entry into the camp. The square is filling up fast with inmates. The gate is wide open. In front of the gate on the outside stands a small open vehicle. (Later to be known to me as a jeep.) Two soldiers are standing in it and two nearby. Their uniforms are unfamiliar to me. One of them is a black man. (the first I have ever seen in my life) and I come to the conclusion that those are Americans. It is so crowded that I can not get closer. So I try to get back. I realize that I can see from a distance better than from up close.

With unbelieving eyes I see the guards on the watch towers that are right behind the electrified fence are climbing down taking with them their machine guns or rifles. They do not carry them like soldiers but pulling them or dragging them by the straps on the ground. I see an SS man dragging his machine gun by a strap making sure that the barrel points to the back. We see him and he sees us looking at him. He smiles to us but it seems to me that I detect behind his smile, hidden fear. The Nazis are coming down from the watch towers but many more are coming out from their nearby barracks just outside the gate. They are prepared and ready. They come with knapsacks on their backs and almost all of them with a suitcase in each hand. They come over to the jeep throwing their rifles on the ground. They unbuckle their military belts on which there hangs a bayonet, a revolver and a couple leather cartridge holders with bullets and are throwing it all down. Those that come off the watch tower are throwing first their weapon at the feet of the Americans, then they go into their barrack and come right out with knapsacks and suitcases. I realize that their belongings were already packed earlier and all they were waiting for were the representatives of the allies. Yet they guarded us to the very last moment.

I look around and notice my Blockaltester. He has a red mark as if he has a cut across his cheek. I figure that he fell running to see the excitement but I notice that his face had a worrisome look.

As soon as our former guards got rid of their weapons, they lined themselves up three abreast without any command and remained standing waiting for an order. When finally the last of them came out, I would estimate that they numbered close to three hundred men. So far the inmates stood inside the gate, blocking the others the exit. Suddenly the mob of inmates run out of the gate and started taking away the guards' suitcases and

knapsacks. I look on with astonishment as the heroic SS men who only half an hour earlier had full control over our lives and deaths, stood there motionless, letting themselves be relieved of their possessions without a word of protest to the Polish and especially the Russian, the just freed inmates. I do not see among the grabbers any Jews, none among them nor among the joyous and jubilant non Jewish former inmates. We Jews stand singly or in small groups looking on like uninvited guests at a celebration.

We, the permanent dwellers of the bottoms, the obscure, the destitute, the lowest in the abyss, the remnants of entire families, entire towns, cities and camps have nothing to celebrate about. It reflects in our eyes, in our faces and in our conduct. I stand by myself and look at the event that is taking place before my eyes as if I would be looking at a film without sense. I feel that I am not there. Only my atrophied invisible ghost floats around here.

I talk to myself: Moishe, do you see and realize what is taking place here? Do you know that you are free? You survived Hitler and lived to see the defeat of Germany. You went through so much suffering. All in order to see this moment and you lived to see it. Rejoice. Be happy. In a blink of an eye the events of the last four years run through my mind. The explusion from Shershev, Chomsk, Pruzany, Auschwitz, Sosnowiec, Mauthausen and Gusin. Yes, I am alive, but whom have I got left? No father, or mother. No sisters or brother. No grandparents, no uncles or aunts. Not even one cousin left of my family in Europe. What have I got to celebrate about?

Our former guards having recovered from their sudden loss of their belongings received an order to march. They set out to an unknown to me direction followed by an American jeep with its four men crew.

I hear loud noises. I turn my head and see a large group of people running from a far corner, our corner of the camp. Those are the German inmates. The hardened criminals, the former big shots, the former trustees, Blockaltesters, capos and foremen, who recently volunteered to join the German army. They are still wearing the African corps uniforms and are very noticeable in the crowd. Their reputation as SS collaborators and cruel supervisors is well known among us and the mass of inmates throws itself in rage at them. The accumulated months and years of wrath spilled over and the crowd did not let up until they were all dead. Although their greatest number of victims were Jews, the only ones that did not participate in that grisly slaughter were the Jews.

Having satisfying their thirst for revenge, the mass of former inmates began to disperse to the barracks. As I walked into our barrack I saw a couple of men eating soup. To my question as to where they got it, they told

me in the next barrack where the future German soldiers were quartered. I grabbed my bowl and ran. Although their barrack No. 16 was next to ours, by the time I got there, the barrel of soup was empty. I among dozens of others started looking around hoping to find something to eat. Unfortunately I was too late. What I did find was a pair of mans socks which I immediately put on. My first pair of socks since I arrived in Auschwitz.

The hunger did not let up. Since we are free now to move about after dark, we start wandering to other barracks. Maybe we will find something to eat. I remember walking into a barrack where close to the door stood a small cast iron stove. Next to the stove stood a young Russian holding in his hand a freshly skinned rabbit hide. He sticks an end of the hide into the fire, waits a moment for the hide to singe and as soon as the hair is gone, he bites into the raw skin. He holds the end of the skin tightly with his teeth and pulls with all his might to tear off a piece. He succeeds and chews that piece a long time. Finally he swallows it and I suspect unchewed. I realized that in that barrack, I will not find any food. Exhausted and hungry, I return to my barrack to sleep.

There is no gong to wake us but we get up the same time anyway. We start forming groups, friends, acquaintances from the same former camp. Nobody wants to be alone. We to form a group. Besides me, there is Czesielsky, my partner to the bunk, Waszkiewicz from town of Lomza, a fellow by the name of Szloime, one Jablonowicz from around Grodno and Heniek, from upper Silesia whose family name I do not remember. What I remember is what he told me while we were still in Sosnowiec. He was a few years older than the rest of us and got married while still in his shtetl's ghetto. Shortly after he lost part of his index finger. When and how he came to Auschwitz I do not remember.

We walk around the camp looking for something to eat. Many are leaving the camp and my comrades suggest that we do the same. I insist that I will not leave the camp on an empty stomach. As we get to the center of the camp, we see a mob of former prisoners besieging the camp magazin. They are trying to get in through the barred windows as the door is impregnable. They succeed finally to break the metal bars of a window. The window is a good meter and a half off the ground and everybody wants to get in. Once you are in how does one get out when the mob is pushing to get in? Eventually we realize that we have to let those inside out before others can get in.

The first from inside appear on the window sill with a large unopened case of margarine. The moment he jumps down with the case in his arms the

crowd throws itself on him. In less than a minute the heavy cardboard case is torn apart and the half kilogram packages of margarine snatched by those who got close to them. The same thing happens to everyone who comes out through the window. We decide to work our way to the window, send one of us in there and as soon as he jump down the window sill, we will throw ourselves at him. Of course with everyone else nearby.

Sure enough, we manage after a struggle to get to the window. One of us gets in and appears soon with a case of margarine. After the ensued struggle we manage to hold on to six packages of margarine. We stop to think what to do with it. We decide to continue looking. After a while we find a few acquaintances. They somehow managed too get some potatoes which they are right now boiling in a pail over an open fire between the barracks. For two cubes of margarine we buy a partnership in the potatoes and wait for it to boil. In such cases, as if in spite, it does not boil. After a long wait we notice bubbles around the rim of the pail and we think that the potatoes are cooked. We pour out the just starting to boil water and grab the potatoes. They are still raw....

For two cubes (packages) of margarine we buy two packages of half a kilogram dried and pressed onion. We join the exodus from the camp. My desire not to leave the camp hungry did not materialize. All I have on me is the camp uniform and I carry my blanket. The march from Sosnowiec to Mauthausen taught me not to part with it.

My friend and I pass through the wide open now camp gate. Not understanding and not realizing the importance of that moment in our lives. Hungry, exhausted and dejected we are placing our first steps into a new and strange world leaving behind a world capable of unimaginable cruelty which we knew so well. A world that succeeded in depriving us of everybody and everything we had. Just like newcomers into the world, we do not know what this world is like and what the future holds for us. We do not think like what is conceived now-a-days normal people. The camp is still in every part of us, in every fiber of our bodies. The first instinct of the primitive man is food. Everyone around us is looking for it and we join the mass, the flood of humanity. We go in search of food but also to distance ourselves from the camp. Away from this place. The farther the better. We are now part of the mass of people. It seems that we are taking up the whole road. As far as my eyes can see in front of me and behind, there are people like me.

A short time later we reach a main road which is just as crowded as ours. To our question as where they are coming from, they answer Mauthausen. Ah, yes, I remember Mauthausen. Where to are you going now? Some shrug

their shoulders. They do not know where to. Just following the crowd. Others say Linz. I have heard of Linz. When I was in Mauthausen, they used to take people daily to clear the streets of Linz after air raids. Now on a wider and straighter road after joining with the people from Mauthausen, one can only guess the amount of prisoners held in Nazi Germany. To think that on a short five kilometer stretch of road were the three camps of Mauthausen with its fifteen thousand inmates, Gusin "A" with twelve thousand and Gusin "B" with as many.

There is no traffic on the road. The whole road is ours. There are no American vehicles. No German nor civilian. On both sides of the road every couple hundred meters, are single farmsteads. It occurs to us to try a farmhouse for food. But no matter where, we try others have beaten us to it.

We see a side road leading to a village some two kilometers away. Nobody wants to leave the main road but the hunger does not let up and we go. A middle aged woman answers the door. We give her the two packages of margarine and the two dried and pressed onion and ask her if she can give us something to eat for it. She tells us to sit at the table saying she will be back shortly. She disappears behind a door.

We sit on chairs and look around not daring to say anything. It is a small brick house. The furniture is well used. We get the impression that its not a rich home. A good quarter of an hour passes and she is not back yet. Did she go for the Germans? The fear of Germans did not disappear overnight. Another few minutes pass by and she walks in with a large frying pan in hand. The pan is full with potatoes fried in margarine and onions. It fills the room with the most pleasant aroma. Needless to say that it was the tastiest meal in years. True we could have used more. We thanked her nicely and left to join the others on the road.

We started to encounter groups of German soldiers. They carried no weapons. At least as far as we could see. Whenever they found themselves in the midst of us and someone frowned on them, they kept on saying: We are not Germans. We are Austrian. As if it was then a difference in them from their or our point of view.

A couple hours later when our hunger which was not satisfied earlier awakened again, we started looking for out of the way places. We knocked on a door and an elderly woman answered. Not having what to barter with, we simply asked her for something to eat. She started to tell us that she is a poor woman and that her sons pay is a small one. One of us asked her what does her son do? To which she said: He is only a guard in Mauthausen. We

shuddered. Here we felt we have the right to take whatever we felt like, but in front of us stands an elderly woman. We turned away in disdain.

On the way back to the main road we reproof each other for letting her off so easy. Joining the crowd on the road we pointed out the house to a group of Russians. From a distance, we saw them leading a goat from that yard. Their conscience did not bother them. At that very moment I was thinking about us Jews; We with our scruples and ethics. Is it then a wonder that we are being taken advantage of by anyone and everyone?

With the approaching night we started looking for some shelter. To go into a German house we did not dare so we decided to sneak into a barn when it will be dark. We sat by the roadside a long while and finally found our way inside a large barn. It must have been a large farm for it had several farm buildings. In one of them we found a huge bin full of dry corn kernels. We spread over it a couple of blankets and went to sleep. In the middle of the night a couple men came in. Seeing us sleeping on the corn kernels, they started laughing. From their conversation I gathered that they are farm hands on this farm. We could not fall asleep expecting the German owner at any minute to evict us. During the night one of us mentioned that corn kernels are edible. To me it was something new, so we started to plan how to take some with us.

Before day break, we filled a small bag with kernels and quietly sneaked out of the barn. Half an hours walk down the main road, we found a tin can. Filling it up with kernels and water, we started to cook it. We cooked it for hours and they were still not soft. Too hungry to wait any longer we started to eat them. We spent the entire morning cooking the kernels. It was almst midday when we started out on our way to Linz. A couple hours later, we could almost make out the city in the distance. I started feeling bad and developed a terrible pain in my stomach. I could not continue further. I stretched out on the young grass, knowing that something was wrong with me. I told the others to go on. I did not want them to watch me expire. The boys would not hear of it. After lying for a while I had to muster all my strength in order to get up and we slowly continued on. To be precise, none of us felt good. We came to the conclusion that it was due to the uncooked corn kernels that started to expand in our stomachs.

At about five in the afternoon we made it to Linz. It was part of Linz that was called Auhoff which lay on the east side of the Danube. To us small town folks, everything in Linz seemed large. The three, four and five story buildings whose length and width stretched from one to the next corner of the street. The tenement houses formed quadrangles which had large gates in the

middle that served as entry to the yard. It was in the yards that all the entrances to the apartments were.

We walked around in the streets that looked almost deserted. Here and there one could see a figure that disappeared quickly in one of the gates. We meet an American soldier. He is slim but close to two meters tall. He speaks to us but we do not understand him and we follow him to a nearby gate. We enter a large yard and first thing I notice are children playing. Children. Children that I have not seen in so long except for those being driven into the yard of the crematorium number three that was so close to our barracks in Birkenau. These children are playing games. Running, laughing. Unconcerned and ignorant of the world we are coming from. How beautiful their world looked in my eyes. With lightening speed appear to me the visions of my little brother, Liowa and my two little sisters, Sonia and Liba who were so cruelly, so mercilessly taken away from this world. I am brought to reality by the laughter and chatter of the children in their "soothing" for me, language. The pain in my chest swells and the ever present question arises. WHY???

I turn my head not to look at them and notice groups of women sitting comfortably on chairs and benches conducting "Gemutlich" relaxing conversations. Many of them are knitting at the same time. The not so deep engrossed in conversation notice us intruders and start giving us annoying and suspicious glances.

We follow the American soldier who is leading us to one of the doors. The door is locked. The soldier moves back a couple steps and with momentum, he throws himself forwards kicking in the door with his foot. The slam of the door startles the women in the yard who look now with obvious fear towards the open door. The soldier waves with his hands signaling we should go in but he stays outside. I think to myself. Why don't you lead us in. We do not dare go into a German house by ourselves. But the soldier does not move. He just waves his hands for us to go in. After several minutes waving his hands, the soldier waves one more time in a gesture of disgust and walks away.

The completely closed in and surrounding yard reminds us of the camp and we get out of there. We start wandering aimlessly around the empty street and alleys. We see from a distance a military truck and assume that it is an American.

It will soon be dark and we do not want to have to spend the night in the street. We start looking for any place, a hole to spend the night in. We come to a wooden fence beyond which we see stocks of boards of all sizes. We

climb over the fence and indeed it is a large lumber yard. Almost in the middle is a wooden shed which turns out to be the watchman's quarters. In a part of the shed is a small room with a hammered together bed made of boards. The so called bed is almost two meters wide. The "bed" contains a straw sack, a sheet and a blanket. There is also a cast iron stove, and a few utensils. Everything looks like it had been left in a hurry. Not waiting for an invitation, we pile into the bed. To our surprise, the two meter wide bed is wide enough for the six of us.

****** THIS IS THE END OF PAGE 875********
(THE WAR IS OVER.)

CE 14

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF BOOK2

The only thing we were capable of thinking about the next morning was food. We go out in the street. There is some traffic. Now and then a truck or jeep passes by with a white star painted on its side. A couple of soldiers throw us their K-rations. We admire the packing and open it carefully. Realizing that it is food, we gulp it down quickly. This only make us even more hungry. Some civilians are on the street, mostly women of middle age or older. We can see some old and older men, but no young men in sight.

After wandering aimlessly for a few hours, we return to our new found home. We see an American truck parked nearby and a few soldiers are loading boards on it. We come over carefully and start helping them. When we have finished, they throw some K-rations our way and drive away.

Next morning they were back again and we earned our breakfast. We walk again the streets looking for our next meal. There are a lot of young people around. Survivors like ourselves, but the majority are Russians, not former inmates, but forced laborers. They were taken by the Germans from their homes to work as farm hands or as factory workers. They were not internees, but they were not permitted to go back home nor to change their place of work. In return they received board and room and a minimal allowance for cigarettes and alike.

Their pent up hatred of Germans manifested itself in those early days in an unbridled lawlessness. They gathered themselves in groups, breaking into German homes and helping themselves to whatever they wanted.

Some of the German homes or apartments were abandoned. They must have belonged to prominent Nazis who grabbed their families and fled, leaving everything behind. After some Russians were through with one such home, they told us to go in and help ourselves. We run in and I remember seeing a basket with onions. I grabed it. On top of the basket lay a pair of mans shoes which I threw away, not having the presence of mind to exchange them for the pair I had on from camp, with wooden soles.

Going out I notice a brown envelope on the floor. I pick it up and look inside. It contains cancelled postal stamps which triggers my childhood hobby and I took it with me.

Onions do not make a meal and we continue our wandering around the streets. We passed by a large gate that seemed to lead into a subterranean passage. The gate is guarded by two American soldiers. We ask some local passer bys and are told that it is an entrance into a huge underground German supply depot and that the watch comes at six in the morning.

We were there the next morning at five. The gate is open. Somebody beat us to it. We go in and look around. We do not believe our eyes. The warehouse takes up the entire block and is filled to overflow with all kinds of food. In boxes, crates, drums, sacks, huge glass jars and heavy laden shelves.

The few that got in before us are in the same situation as we. They cannot decide what to take first. We finally make up our minds. Each takes something and we start going to the gate. Suddenly American soldiers appear at the entrance. We are trapped. Behind us we hear a voice: This way! We turn around. One of the early comers points in the opposite direction. We drop everything and run after him. Sure enough, on the other side of the warehouse is another open gate. We get there just in time to see a group of American soldiers getting ready to take up guard positions. We run by them and disperse The soldiers are giving chase. I find myself running side by side with Leibel Washkevitz (Waszkiewicz), the one that helped me up the hill from the rail way station to Mauthausen at the end of our infamous march. He is hanging on to a paper bag full of sugar cubes. The bag breaks and the cubes start pouring out. We run leaving a trail of sugar cubes behind us, making sure that the Americans do not loose us. Yet they soon give up the chase and we end up with some twenty kilo of sugar.

More and more American trucks keep coming for lumber. We began to know them and load their trucks. In return, they showered us with food, particularly K-rations and canned food.

No more did we have to go looking for food. We could not resist eating. Not being accustomed to such rich food, we soon developed diarrhea. I recall making myself nightly promises to stop eating so much during the day, yet when day came and I saw so much food around, I could not resist it, paying for it by spending most of the night running to the toilet, which in our case, was the entire timber yard.

In free hours, I used to walk around the neighborhood to look at the destruction brought about by the allied bombardment.

Once we came upon what looked like a giant factory and was leveled to the ground. The space took up about 4-5 square kilometers. The extent of the destruction was such that it was impossible to tell where the buildings stood and where yards began. One could see rail car after rail car destroyed on the track with some of the rails twisted like wire around them. Dozens of destroyed locomotives in different positions. Some one on top of the other., I have seen two locomotives as if sitting on their bottoms, the wheels of one entangled with those of the other as if in a final embrace. There were countless open cover freight cars with their contents of sand, cement, gravel

and stones spilled around them due to the blown away sides or bottoms. One could get the impression that the Germans had hope of rebuilding that destruction.

There was not a living soul to ask what stood there before. It was only after we got off the place that we found a local to ask about it. The answer was ,"Gerring Werke."

Yes, we had heard of the largest and well known tank factory in Germany that carried Herman Gerring's name.

We walk away feeling grateful to the allied airmen for doing such a thorough job.

A couple of days later, we have a visit from three Germans. They are in their early-middle age. One of them says that he is a butcher and that he would like to butcher a horse in the empty part of our shed and in return we will be rewarded with a choice cut of horse meat.

I recall that day not even a month ago when by chance I got a piece of horse knee in my soup in Gusin and the promise I made to myself. We agree.

The next day the three of them appear with a horse in tow. They lead him into the empty part of the shed. I do not like to see it nor do I want to be around when they kill it and so I walk away.

I must have taken a long walk for I remember being in the centre of town when I suddenly bump into "Harry." Harry was half a dozen years older than I. A German Jew who was arrested during "Kristal Night" in 1938 and was taken to "Buchenwald". He never saw freedom, but after going through a few other camps, was taken to Auschwitz in early 1944. From there to Sosnowitz. Upon arrival by coincidence he was asked by our camp commandant what other camp he was in. Hearing that he was in Buchenwald in 1938 where our commandant was there an ordinary SS man at that time, the commandant made him immediately a capo.

As I mentioned many time before, not all capos were beasts. He was a decent fellow and conducted himself examplary. We often used to conduct political discussions in the quiet. He never failed to defend his communistic leanings.

Here he suddenly appears before me from nowhere. He looked well fed and well dressed for that time. We start talking and I see that he is even more committed to his cause than before. He asks me why I do not go back to my shtetl which is now the Soviet Union. I look at him as if he lost his mind. We part never to hear from each other again.

When I return to our quarters, there is no sign of the three Germans or the horse. They have taken away the meat and the hide. The rest they buried and

covered up not leaving a trace. As payment they left a chunk of meat from the neck, no knee. I really did not want the knee anyway.

I did not have the strength to control my eating habit and suffered for it. While others kept putting on weight on their skeletons, I could not put on an extra kilo on my thirty seven kilo frame after liberation.

From occasional meetings with survivors, we learnt that a small refugee camp for Polish Jews is being opened nearby. We did not loose much time and came to see it for ourself.

It was a small former labor camp, consisting of 3-4 huts. Each hut partitioned into 3-4 rooms. In each room some half a dozen cots with straw sacks. It had running water, and what is more important, it was already set up with a little office run by an elected committee from among survivors. They were registered with the local authorities and were receiving a daily allotment of food.

We liked what we saw and we joined them. Gone were the American K-rations and the cans of bully beef on which I gorged myself daytime and the cause of my being sick at night. Here I was back on a close to camp diet of coffee and bread for breakfast, a bowl of thick soup at noon and again coffee and bread at night. None of the above to excess.

Within a week I was cured and slowly began to put on weight.,

Not more than half a kilometer away from there were former German military barracks. Now Americans were quartered in them. Those were solid brick modern buildings that were connected by one central heating and water system that was located in a basement of one of the buildings.

Exactly how, I do not remember, but the six of us had succeeded in getting the job of furnace attendants and stockers.

We had to be at work five in the morning to make sure there was hot water by six when the soldiers started getting up. We worked two shifts until nine at night. Having permits we could come and go as we pleased.

In return we used to line up with the soldiers at breakfast and lunch. Never failing to impress the soldiers with our unsatiated appetite. And eat we did. The cooks used to give us all kinds of goodies like canned food which either there was not enough to go around for all or they were too lazy to open.

There was a private shower for us in the basement and soldiers who did not want to wait in line upstairs, used to use ours. Many used to leave us presents, like cigarettes, chocolate, even sometimes their discarted clothes like pants and shirts.

Working, we missed the meals in camp but we sure made up for it at the American kitchen. Some of the canned food we used to take to our room, where we kept it for an emergency.

There was another survivor camp a kilometer away, which housed former inmates and forced laborers from different countries. I was told that in that camp is also my friend Leibel Bliskowsky with whom I shared any extra food in Sosnowiec. We came together from Sosnowitz to Mauthausen and from there I was taken to Gusin leaving him behind. I had not seen him nor had I heard from him.

I got to that refugee camp at sunset and began to look for him. In the light of the setting sun, somebody pointed out to me a small figure squatting by a small fire in an empty field. As I came closer, I noticed that he is tending the fire that was heating something in a small tin over it.

He recognized me, extending his hand but keeping an eye on the tin can. I looked in it and saw the tin contained chicken feet. Without saying a word, I kicked the can with my foot and the can went flying spreading the chicken feet all over the place. He looked at me asking in an angry voice, "Why did you do it? It is my supper." I answered; Come with me. I have something better than this.

That very same evening, he came to our room where he had his first proper meal six weeks after liberation.

A couple of weeks later, we began to hear rumors that our part of Linz will be handed over to the Soviets and that the dividing line is the river Danube. In order to get to the other side we had to go over the bridge which was guarded by American soldiers and one had to have a pass proving that he lives on the other side. If a foreigner, he would have to have a special permit from the American authorities.

All of us in our small camp, without exception wanted to get to the other, American, side and began to make preparation for it.

A few days later a jeep pulls in our refugee camp and four military men got out. We see they have the word "Palestine" sewn on their upper sleeves. They greet us with the word "Shalom" and start a conversation in Hebrew. Those of us who do not speak Hebrew, conversed in Yiddish.

They are soldiers from the Jewish brigade and now looking to establish contact with other Jewish survivors. They are telling us that the British government is blockading the shores of Palestine and that the "Yishoov", the Jewish community in Palestine is trying to break that blockade by smuggling in the survivors illegally.

They, as allied soldiers can move about former Nazi occupied Europe, finding out where there are remnants of European Jews and help them in their effort to come to Palestine.

Their missions is right now to get out as many Jews as possible from the territories overtaken by the Soviet Union, like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and others.

We too fell into this category as the Soviets were about to take over this part of Austria from the Americans.

A week or so later, soldiers of the Jewish brigade began to carry small groups of us boys across the brigde. Some of us were told to try and make it on our own as the soldiers found it difficult to get us all across.

The American base where we six worked began to pack up, but we were asked to stay on so that to the last moment, they would have hot water.

The officer in charge promised to take us over the bridge when the time came.

My friend Leibel Bliskowsky left with the others, and only we six remained from the couple of hundred.

Sometimes at the end of July, the American officer told us to get ready. We got in a small truck. Two soldiers in front and we left the base and the suburb of "Auhoff."

Crossing the bridge the truck did not stop in the city but continued further. Unable to communicate with the driver who sat in the cab, we did not know where we were going. After a long drive passing through villages and towns, we drove into a good side city through a big gate and into a big and crowded yard. The truck stopped and the two soldiers motioned for us to get out. We took our meager belongings, shaking hands with us the soldiers got in the truck and left.

We were in "Saltzburg", in a large refugee camp filled with people from all earlier Nazi occupied Europe. We soon found some of the guys from our camp who left a week or two earlier. Surprisingly the Americans knew where to find them and took us all the way there.

We were given a corner in a room to serve as accomodation. A piece of bread and tea in the morning, a bowl of soup at noon and tea and bread at night. No sufficient facilities to wash nor toilets.

The crowd could be divided into two main groups: Former inmates of concentration camps and former forced laborers. The majority of the former were Jews, some Russians and some Poles, but all the forced laborers were non Jews, among whom former Nazi sympathizers and collaborators as well

as capos of camps were parading as refugees. Surprisingly, some were recognized and dealt with in a harsh manner.

In general the camp in Saltzburg was one big mass with hundreds of people coming and leaving daily. Here again I was reunited with Leibel Bliskowsky and a few days later, we were sent to "Insbruck" to a camp for Jewish only survivors.

A couple of days later a small group from the Jewish brigade arrived. One of the officers addressed us. I still remember some of what he said: "From here you are going to Italy. It is as close to Palestine as we can get you right now. You know that the road by land is closed to us for we are surrounded by an unfriendly people and the only way is by sea which is being blockaded by the British navy. You might have to wait in Italy a long time and we are not promising you anything in Italy except a beautiful blue sky. So if anyone wants to back out, now is the chance."

Of course he spoke of other things. Above all, about our struggle for a Jewish homeland, but I will not go into it now,.

Within a few days we boarded a long freight train which was carrying Italian repatriates back to Italy and we were on our way.

The train was a very lone one, consisting of only freight cars. As it was early August, we kept the sliding doors and the openings that served as windows constantly open and had a good view of the countryside as we moved south. We traveled very slowly, stopping at every station. Some of the stations had red cross stands where they used to hand out bread and bottled water.

At times we used to stop in the middle of nowhere surrounded by beautiful nature. The fast flowing little rivers looked inviting and we used the stops for a quick bath.

I still remember the scenery moving slowly through the "Brenner Pass" as we entered Italy. What a beautiful view!!

After three days travel, we arrived in Bolonia, where we, the Jewish survivors were put up in tents provided by the Jewish brigade. Two days later trucks from the same brigade took us to "Modena". Somewhere in the middle of the city was a huge building, built according to late nineteen century Italian architecture with spacious rooms and hallways. Something to be admired. Its purpose; to be a military academy. It was used as such until the end of the war. Now it became a refugee center for Jews only, except for one distance corner where a few dozen SS women were kept, supervised by American military police.

In this esthetic building and its huge halls, the allied forces had squeezed in some five thousand of us. We were told to find a place to sleep, which meant anywhere on the stone floor. How many we were in a room depended on the size of the room, but to have an idea, I will say from a couple of dozen to a couple of hundred. We used to lie along every wall and in rows in the middle of the rooms. This very spot served for each of us as a bed at night and as a chair or table daytime.

In the morning we used to line up for our piece of bread and black coffee. At noon for the macaroni and at night again for a piece of bread and coffee.

Needless to say that we were hungry. True, not the same hunger as in the camps. Never the less, I, we, were always ready to eat. In order to supplement our diet, some of us began to sell some of our few belongings. Having brought with me a few pair of discarded American military pants and shirts, I too started to sell my things.

A few hundred meters away was a bakery where some of us used to buy bread, rather rolls.

I did so too, but the baker had no bag to put them in. After stuffing my pockets full, I took the rest in my arms. Some fell on the ground and while bending down to pick them up, I lost two or three more. I do not remember how many I came back with, but I remember telling Leibl Bliskowsky that it is no good going by myself for rolls, as I keep loosing them.

This remark was overheard by a man that had his sleeping spot not far from us. His name was Berl Bluestein. He came from a village twelve kilometers from Pruzany, which was a railway station, by the name of "Linovo-Oranczyce." After the German arrival, he, his wife and two children moved to Pruzany. When the Jews of "Linovo" were slaughtered, his move to Pruzany proved to be a correct one. This Berl Bluestein was some twenty years older than I, yet surprisingly survived Auschwitz, leaving there his wife and children. Leibl Bliskowsky and he knew each other from the ghetto Pruzany but I did not know him at all.

This Bluestein says: I will go with you and help you carry the rolls. I gratefully agreed. On the way back, without asking or saying anything, he starts eating the rolls, never stopping until we get back. Ever since he used to go with me to the baker and became a third partner.

In no time I managed to dispose of my possessions. We ate up the value of the couple pairs of pants and shirts I had and we were back to the bare minimum.

There were rumors that in some refugee camps upon arrival one got a new pair of shoes or pants or both. In other camps one got a few hundred liras,

which was worth a dollar or two, but to one who had nothing, a hundred or two hundred liras was money.

Not having anything else to barter, and unable to fill our stomachs, Leibl Bliskowsky and I had decided to go to Milano. There was no regular transportation yet, and the only means available was hitch hiking. At the entrance and exits of each city in Italy there was a check point and every vehicle was stopped by the police to be checked for papers. During those few seconds, the bunch of hitch hikers used to climb on top of the vehicles. Of course there was never enough room for all. But some always managed to get on.

As this was the only way of getting around, we two joined the mob of hitch hikers at the outskirts of Modena in the direction of Milano. All we had with us was an address of the Jewish community centre there, which I still remember; Via Unione No. 5

After a long wait, we succeeded in getting on a truck which took us as far as Parma, from there the whole story repeated itself until we came to the river "Po", where we joined a long line of waiting vehicles to cross the pontoon bridge erected by the allied soldiers. We could see the nearby destroyed by the retreating Germans original bridge, and I must admit, they had done a good job in destroying it. Every one of the massive supporting pillars was blown up separately never to be used again. I can see them now heavy huge pillars, some dozen of them, all toppled over, lying on their sides as if pushed over by a giant hand.

The pontoon bridge could carry one way traffic which alternated every hour or so.

We arrived in Milano before dark. Sitting on top of the loaded truck, I looked at the people on the street thinking to myself, that there must be many Jews in Milano, for they looked very Jewish in my opinion.

The truck let us off somewhere in the city and we began to ask for directions to Via Unione No. 5. Getting there after midnight we found the office closed but a few refugees like ourselves were hanging around. They directed us to a couple of rooms in the building partly filled with sticks. We found others lying on those sticks and we joined them.

Next day we received instructions to register in a camp which was right in the city. The sleeping accomadations were on the floor and to cover ourselves, we received a blanket each. The food situation was as bad as in Modena if not worse. So after a couple of days, Bliskowsky and I decided to return to Modena. Taking with us the blanket we set out to the railway station, having heard that some trains are running.

As we had no money we could not use the street cars and it took us a couple of hours to get there. The front of the station was very imposing with its columns of pillars and the two large lion like figures on either side. It was already dark but there was a mass of people in that huge station. Some looked like they had been sitting there a long time.

Speaking the few words Italian and mixing it with German, we found out that there is a train to Modena in the morning. We settled down for the night on the stone floor.

After midnight it got quieter so we could see what is taking place. Almost all the travelers were civilians but there was a sprinkling of military personal. Mostly allied soldiers who knew exactly where to go. But there were a few in Italian uniforms.

What caught my eyes, was a group of unsoldierly or sloppy looking soldiers that I have ever seen before. In age, they were between twenty and twenty two, they wore British uniforms which made them look like a caricature of British soldiers that even Goebbels could not have conjured up. A noisy bunch who spoke in a strange tongue. The man in command, the most and only soldierly looking among them, kept on trying to line them up in a line. But to no avail. By the time he got to the end of the line, the head was coming apart. Yet he would not give up and kept on trying. They became the main attraction to the many hundreds that had to spend the night there. In answer to my question of where are they from, one bystander shaking his head in disgust said: North Africa. I think to myself: for what purpose did the British permit such a bunch of ignorant, untrained, undisciplined North Africans to wear their uniforms?

The answer became known to me a year later. The British needed it to counter balance the contribution of the Jews of Palestine and to minimize their effort vis-a-vis the Arabs in the defeat of Germany.

Coming back to Modena, I remarked how much more, we survivors, are noticeable here than in Milano. Not surprising, while in Milano, a city of over two million people, there were a few hundred of us. Here in Modena, a city a quarter the size of Milano, we were five thousand strong.

There was another group of people that were more visible than us in Modena. Those were American soldiers. They were of course more respected, better treated and most sought for. And why not? They were the liberator for many Italians too. Particularly for the northern half of Italy, who were under the rule of Nazi Germany longer than the south. They were the rich, even the poorest had their pocket full of cigarettes, chocolate, gum and ladies hose.

They used to take out signiorinas to the amusement park just at the outskirts of town and go on rides. Take them to restaurants, dances and so on. Who can blame the young American soldiers. The legitimate, and they were legitimate houses of repute all over Italy had signs on either side of their doors. A large white circle with an "X" in it, over it with large painted in white letters was written "Off limits", making it clear for allied soldiers not to go in.

But even we could notice the gradual decline in numbers of the American service men, for they were going home. My friend, Bliskowsky who was a smoker used to follow the Americans and pick up their cigarette butts. With less American, there were less cigarettes butts, forcing him to smoke less, which eventually led to him giving up smoking.

My only enjoyment used to be going go movies. The movie houses used to be open right through the night and once in, one could spend the night there which happened with some of us. Not so much too see the movies as to be under a roof in a strange city or town.

Even though entries to movie houses were cheap, one still had to pay something and I did not have that something. Leibl Bliskowsky and I decided to undertake the long trip to Torino, where we heard that there too was a refugee camp and it might be better there.

We set out the same way as the first time, namely hitch hiking, and got as far as Piacenza. The truck we were on did not go any farther. We got off at the police check point on the outskirts of town and waited. As usual there was traffic and some of the hitch hikers got on, but we were not the lucky ones, and as usual military vehicles were not stopped. After a long wait in the midday Italian sun, we see an army truck pulling up and stops almost in front of us. Nobody runs to him knowing that army rather allied vehicles, do not pick up hitch hikers. Nor do we. They are dressed in British uniforms , two get out from the cab and half a dozen or so from the back of the truck. They gather around and are having what seemed like a little discussion. We look at them and see "Palestine" on their shoulder markings. A little hesitantly we approach and try to listen to their conversation. They notice us and look around inquisitively yet with a sense of recognition. We somehow see breathern in each other. We find out that they are a group of entertainers that travel to the bases of the Jewish brigade to entertain them. In that group there were two girls. They all surround us showering us with questions. I recall that one of the soldiers was from "Bialistok" and as Bliskowsky was originally from a village by the name of "Jalowka" near Bialistook, that soldier kept asking him about his family that he left behind.

They realized that we have nothing, so they started bringing us tin of meat and fish, loaves of bread, chocolate and even a suit case of military work clothes from the truck.

After a long and amiable conversation, they apologized that they can not take us closer to our destination as they are turning off the main road and left.

The impression they left on us, the feeling of having seen, spoken to and physically touched Jewish soldiers in a strange land amongst strangers after years of Nazi tyranny, I am not sure I could have described it then and I will not attempt now. All I know was that this encounter injected in me a new hope, a kind of happiness that I had not felt in a long long time.

We looked at our unexpected riches and realized that with all that food, we can not continue to Torino. Besides, who needs Torino with all this food. So we cross the road to get on anything that moves back to Modena.

In the next two or so weeks, I took in all the movies I could. Two after lunch and two at night . In the mornings, all the five thousand of us used to line up along the balcony that ran around the large cobble stoned yard of the academy to watch the American M.P.'s taking the women SS for a walk around. We were not even permitted at that time to remain on the ground floor, so we used to hurl abuse at them from above. I must admit that we were good at it. After all, we had learnt it from them. I would like to say that a good part of us did not understand the meaning of the many words we used, including myself. In my experience, it seemed there was no end to the profusion of offensive and abusive words in the German language. Whoever challenges this statement, has not been in Auschwitz.

After a while, the American M.P.'s were replaced by British, whose escort of the SS women became very comradly. One could get the impression of chaperonship. It looked more like a contest between British gentlemen to win the favor of the fair maidens than what should have been between guards upholders of justice towards imprisoned vicious beasts who participated in murder of hundreds of thousands of defenseless and innocent human beings. Now they were being paraded in front of five thousand witnesses whose families were slaughtered by those very beats and who themselves were victims of their brutality and beastliness. Than again British twisted "objectivity or impartiality" toward Jews especially in the years after the war are well known and documented.

No more than two weeks after my encounter with the soldiers of the Jewish brigade I was back in the poor house. A few guys were talking of going to Torino and I joined them. Leibl Bliskowsky refused to go along.

The trip was a difficult one and took a long time. Upon arriving we asked and were directed to a Jewish centre, a building with several rooms, one of them served as an assembly room where in the evening, the few young people, the remnance of the once fairly large and prosperous Jewish community of Torino used to gather and spend the evenings in lonliness reminiscing about their families that were taken away never to be heard from.

We decided to stay that evening. About a dozen young people of our age showed up, mostly girls, for they had found it a little easier to hide among the Italians than men. However, there was the problem of communication. They spoke Italian or French, being close to the French border. We spoke neither until one of the girls said something in Hebrew. None of my group spoke Hebrew except I. Here I was in my element. That girl was the only one amongst them and I amongst ours. So the entire conversation passed through the two of us.

Later on in the evening a couple of Jewish soldiers from a South African detachment stationed nearby, came in. They were frequent visitors we were told. One of them played piano and we started to dance. The first dance after those night marish years and my first as a mature man. I will say that the evening spent in Torino holding a girl in my arms even only while dancing, awakened in me feelings that I had forgotten existed.

Torino had no more to offer than Modena and we returned back.

Sometime in August, I bumped into a Shereshevian I never expected to be alive. His name was Eli Shneider and older brother of my friend Hershel Shneider, who came with me from Pruzany to Auschwitz and with whom I walked on Sundays in the birch alley in the spring of 1943.

Eli Shneider was the son of Berl, by name like his profession a (Shneider) tailor. He was born in 1916. He was a tall, good looking young man, active in "Hashomer" (left Zionist) from his youth, a polite well behaved young man was drafted into the Polish army in 1938. He was one of many that never returned home after the collapse of Poland. Unable to trace his where abouts due to the partition of Poland, his family mourned him among others as a war casualty. And so it was accepted generally.

For me to have seen him in Modena meant a return from the grave. That is what he told me: His battalion surrendered to the Germans with the surrender of the remnants of the Polish army. In his battalion were a lot of soldiers from our neighboring villages. As neighbors they felt kinship towards him. When the Germans were picking out the Jews from among his battalion, they advised him not to admit to his Jewishness, and they did not betray him. As the Germans were making the list of the non Jews he gave

his name as "Sneider," which is more German than Polish. With some of his comrades he was sent to work on a German farm and his friend never betrayed him. In fact sometime in 1942 he decided to go home after hearing in Germany of mistreatment of Jews, not realizing how serious it was. He set out for the railway station and his friends ran after him and persuaded him to come back.

With the end of war, he came to Italy with the intention of going to Palestine. Because of his experience in leadership of "Hashomer Hatzoir", in Shershev, he was put in charge of a group of minors in a small camp outside of Modena. However, every time he was in Modena, he used to visit me and constantly kept on asking abut the last months before and after the expulsion from Shershev, the life of his family in ghetto Pruzany and about my few conversations with his brother on Sunday mornings in Auschwitz.

One morning he comes to me and says: Do you want to go to Palestine? Sure I do, I answered. Then get ready. In a few days my entire group of minors will be taken to a secret place from where they will go at night to a ship to board for Palestine.

At that time it was not a to well kept secret that ships departed from Italy with illegal emigrants, namely survivors and refugees of the Holocaust. Destination: Palestine.

The British tried with any means possible to stop this activity. By continuously keeping an eye on the Jewish brigade that they knew is the main force behind this action. By checking all suspected vehicles on the roads of Italy looking not only for potential travelers but anything required for longer journeys over land or sea. Trying to find the spot of embarkation so they could seize the boat and finally blockading the shores of Palestine with their navy.

I jumped for joy but then I remembered my friend, Leibl Bliskowsky who was eighteen years my senior. I said; You will have to take the two of us with you. He, already having met Bliskowsky through me earlier, said; No, this can not be done You I can pass as a minor, but not him. They will not let him aboard

I was caught between my life's desire to go to the land of Israel and loyalty to a friend with whom I shared so much suffering and trust, whom I have known to be the most honest and unselfish person I had ever met and a true friend.

I answered; I will not go without him. Eli left. For almost a year we were in touch. But suddenly I stopped getting letters from him. Later I found out that he committed suicide. A victim of love.

He succeeded to cheat death as a Jew in Nazi Germany to kill himself by his own hand in the land of Israel.

Sometime in late August or early September the municipal authority of Milano, or some other authority through the municipality began to pay refugees some fifteen hundred liras monthly. By then the trains began to run, and we refugees did not have to pay passage. In general the railway system was at that time in confusion and most of the Italian travelers did not pay either.

It is difficult to imagine traveling in those days in Italy. Not only was there standing room only, but some sat on the roofs, having to duck or drop flat on the roof entering a tunnel.

That trip to Milano I remember, for we were so tightly squeezed together in the car, that in the morning upon arriving in Milano and getting out of the car, I noticed that the back of my hands were swollen. A result of having kept my arms straight down for over twelve hours pressed tightly to my body.

I and all the others that came with me collected the fifteen hundred liras. At that time the value of seven dollars and by nightfall we got on the train.

On my way back I was not lucky enough to get inside a car, so I sat on the buffer between two cars all night hanging on with my hands to some protruding bolt of the car, keeping myself from falling down to the tracks inbetween the cars.

When we got off at Modena station, one of my friends noticed a long cut down the back of my pants. It seemed that my pants got caught in the buffer spring and over night they chafed a long hole down my only pair of pants.

Sometime in October we were informed that our entire refugee camp is going to be transferred to other camps, further down south Italy to its very heel. Shortly afterwards, every few days some of us were being taken by truck to the rail way station, put on trains going south.

By then our partnership consisted of three. Berl Bluestein joined the two of us and when our turn came, we traveled together.

The means of transportation were the same as the ones from Linz to Modena; ordinary freight cars with wide open doors on either side. We sat on our knap sacks which held our meager possessions and when possible stretched out on the floor for a nap. For food, we were each given a few packages of biscuits and a couple of tins canned meat.

Here again we were thrown together with survivors from all over central and eastern Europe. The great majority of men between the ages of twenty to thirty. About ten percent were women of that same age. The others were a couple of years younger, or a few years older. Yet we felt a kinship that

holds us together and which expressed itself in the way we approach one another and speak to each other. As if we had known each other since birth, made easier by a common language. Yiddish. Despite the fact that we come from at least half a dozen countries.

We travel south, to the right in the distance I can see mountain tops and to the left no more than a few hundred meters away, a steel gray very leveled plain. To my remark, someone tells me this is the sea, the Adriatic.

So this is what the sea looks like, I think to myself. After three days of travel we come to a very small railway station named "Otranto." So small that one could by pass it without noticing it, except that this is the end of the line and from here on the train goes back.

We get off the train. There are several open trucks waiting for us. We climb in and we take off. The road continues down hill. On either sides, rocky terrain alternating with small plots of red soil which is being utilized to every square inch. Every ten or fifteen meters apart, there is an olive tree. Some seem to grow out of a rock. In the distance we see the sea which is getting closer, despite the fact that the road is very winding.

It is still down hill when we drive into a village. We stop in front of a building where we are being registered, given an I.D. card and given an address. We wander in the village that has some beautiful villas. Some surrounded by palm trees. Some by gardens. Some with both. But they look terribly neglected, as if nobody had touched them in years.

In the few streets we met some refugees. They too are from our part of the world. They too do not go home, even though they have their family and close family, like maybe parents, siblings and others. We know them. We know them too well. They are the ones that welcomed the Nazis as soon as they came in to our shtetls. The ones that pointed us, and our homes, out to the Nazis. To take in there the Nazis and to help themselves to whatever they wanted. In payment giving the Jewish owners a good beating if not worse. They are the ones that joined the local police organized and supervised by the German authorities. They are the ones that helped the Germans round up the Jewish. Drive them out of town and shoot them at the edge of the ditches that they, the Jews, had just dug for themselves. They are the ones that volunteered into the SS to fight with the Germans against their own country, their own people. And now they cannot go back home knowing that they will be tried as traitors and mass murderers.

I will take my case a bit further and say that they were the ones that got priority to enter the democratic countries, like Canada, the U.S, South

America, Australia, New Zealand and others before any of us Jewish refugees had a chance.

They entered those countries with the knowledge of the above mentioned governments, with their help and what is more, were protected by those governments from persecution in those very countries. Those very same countries refused to extradite them to the countries in which those crimes were committed.

We do not know the street on which there is the house we are assigned to us, but we won't ask them. We will look by ourselves.

The house we are assigned is a two storey house. It is built on a slope so that it has two entrances. The bottom floor has an entrance to a street below. The upper floor has the entrance in the other direction to another street. The two floors do not connect.

The bottom floor is occupied by a family from Yugoslavia. They are not Jewish and we wonder why they are not going home. The upper floor has several rooms. They must be part of the entire house, for there are no kitchen facilities. Each group takes a room. The rooms are assigned according to size of the group. We three get a room whose window faces the street. There is a palm tree quite neglected in front of the window and so is the stone wall surrounding the front of the house. No trouble to see that this must have been a nice villa once.

The place we are in is called "Santa Marina Di Leuca." One of some half a dozen summer resorts along the shore of the very tip of the Italian heel. The place has many beautiful villas. They belong to the former Italian ruling class who are sitting now in their homes in the cities or estates, unwilling to claim their property for fear of "rocking the boat" due to their sympathy and support of the former fascist government.

So now their property is neglected. Really abandoned after first being used by the demoralized Italian army, then by the allied forces and now by refugees.

This refugee camp is better organized. It has been here for a while. Here the war has ended a year ago. The administration is run by American and British semi military personal with the paid help of qualified Italians. The villas these people live in have been repaired and furnished. They have housekeepers, cooks and gardeners who were paid allied wages, so are the administrative personal, the Americans and British. Particularly the British who seem to be running the show and be everywhere.

It would be wrong not to mention that among the Americans there were some volunteers. Apparently from religious denominations who got little pay if any and were there for humanitarian reasons. To them, I tip my hat.

Apparently somebody in the "Unrra," (United Nations Refugee Restitution Assistance) organization realized that putting Jewish survivors of the Holocaust together with central and eastern Europeans so called "refugees", in fact Nazi collaborators was not a good idea and within two weeks they were transferred to other refugee camps consisting of their own kind.

Those two weeks gave us a chance to get organized and take over positions previously held by the now departing refugees, like electing a committee to run the internal affairs of the camp, cultural committee, work shops, training courses for all kinds of trades, even some to police and keep law and order in the camps. Not that it was needed. We were murdered but we were not murderers. Everything was stolen from us but we were no thieves. Besides we had nothing of value. We were strong armed but we did not impose our will on others. In fact it seemed that this is the safest place I had known since the beginning of the war and maybe even earlier.

During those early days, we have even received a sort of bed. It was a wooden frame supported on four pieces of two by fours a foot off the ground which one could call legs. For a mattress, there was hammered on a chicken netting stretched across the quadrangle wooden frame and we each received a straw sack. It was better than the stone floor of Modena. The bed also used as a sitting place. For a table we found a discarded crate and thus our room was "furnished."

Some larger groups over thirty souls or more, who know each other from camps, or came from the same vicinity or neighboring towns, or shared the same political Zionist affiliation organized what they called "Kibbutz" meaning as a group they occupied one building. They drew the ration from the camp magazin (store) for all the members and cooked it in their separate kitchen for their group. This way they could decide their own menu. They could exchange the unwanted food for something else and supplement their diet with more preferrable produce.

Approximately a dozen groups, Kibbutzim, existed in "St. Marina Di Leuca," yet I would say that half of the camp used to go to the main kitchen. A converted movie house to receive their daily ration of bread with coffee in the morning, their soup with some pieces of meat at lunch and coffee only at night. When there was no more meat cooked with the soup, we used to receive a 4 ounce tin of salmon, which happened once a week.

Regularly every morning many of us used to line up in front of the kitchen with all kinds of containers for the coffee. In our case only one of us used to go taking with him our three ration card. Each card used to be made out for the month ahead, clearly indicating the day and each meal. When one used to present the card, a hole for that meal was punched out. The amount of food used to be given according to the presented card.

I will admit that in the early months, I used to go to bed hungry.

True to the promise of the soldiers of the Jewish brigade, I have so far not seen a cloud in the beautiful Italian sky. More than this, here we were on the tip of the Italian heel where we could jump almost from the window into the blue Mediterranean sea. It is not much of an exaggeration, from our living quarters to the sea there was no more than several hundred meters. True, the shore was completely rocky except for a stretch of shore some twenty five meters wide, and the rocks were of volcanic origin and very sharp. The waves were strong at that point and one had to be careful not to be thrown on the racks getting out of the water.

Yet not only was it for most of us the first time in the sea, but we also became not bad swimmers for amateurs.

That fall the majority of our camp numbering some thousand people, spent most of the days at the sea shore of the Italian heel.

True not on full stomachs. Never the less the sea and sun worked wonders for us.

The Milano municipality was still paying out those earlier registered, the three thousand liras monthly and those of us who qualified had to travel by train. A trip of three days in one direction, to collect it. We refugees took advantage of being able to travel on the trains for free, but we put up with the inconvenience of spending a week traveling in order to collect it. Converting it into dollars, it amounted to fifteen dollars. Hardly a paying proposition, but when one has not got even this much, it was of some help. But this did not last long. It stopped by November 1945.

In early December, the camp committee announced that a marine school for survivors is being formed someplace in Italy and applications are being accepted. I applied and was accepted. I was sent to Bari where I joined three other men. One man of about fifty, an engineer by profession, the second of about thirty, the same profession, both were from Hungary, and succeeded to avoid being shipped to Auschwitz. The third too was an engineer from the Soviet Union, who claimed to have been the capitan or first officer on the Soviet submarine "Stalin."

Others that came from the southern part of Italy were collected in Bari and sent on further north. The reason that I was attached to the three mentioned above, was my knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish, for they did not speak a word of Hebrew and little Yiddish, and all the arrangements of the school was conducted in Hebrew. Being organized by people specially sent from the land of Israel. Those three were to be the future teachers in that school.

In order to get an idea of what the school should be like, we were sent via Rome to a place some thirty kilometers west of Rome on the Tyrrhenian Sea, called "Ostia," where such a school has already been operating.\

After spending there a few days, we were sent to a small fishing town some fifty kilometers north west of Ancona on the Adriatic sea by the name of Fano. A town of some ten thousand inhabitants. A large percentage making a living from the already over fished Adriatic sea. It was there that I saw for the first time ships, or rather wooden schooners being built, which gave employment to some of the townspeople.

We joined there the already settled body of students and staff in what must have been a former for this purpose built facility.

The total body of students came to some one hundred and twenty, plus the kitchen, maintenance and teaching staff. We were some hundred and fifty souls.

The acomodations were very primitive, for, from what we could deduct, there was nothing left from furniture or even kitchen utensils. They must have been stolen by the Germans during their retreat, or taken by the local population, which looked impoverished even in our eyes, taken during the change of governments.

Food was not any more plentiful than in the previous refugee camps, except for bread and a large barrel of lard full to the rim, which stood in the corner of the kitchen. The door or window of the kitchen was always open for us and to which everyone of us used to return every couple of hours for a slice of bread spread thinly with lard, passed out to us by a member of the kitchen staff.

As some of the teachers were Italian living in town, it was concluded that the lectures will be conducted in Italian. Besides, the books we had to use were written in Italian.

So the first item on the agenda was to teach us the Italian language which started right away. The three Jewish teacher that came with me from Bari, began meantime to teach their subject, which were temporarily conducted in an unspecified language. That is, in any language the teacher could make himself understood and could make the students understand.

Here is where my knowledge of Russian and Polish came in handy. The teacher from the Soviet Union could hardly speak Yiddish, so most of the lecture used to be conducted in Russian and I would immediately translate it into Yiddish or Polish, whatever it was better understood by the students that particular time.

The two Hungarian teachers had a harder time. Poor in Yiddish, not knowing Polish, they faced classes consisting of ninety five percent Jews from Poland. They had to make do with a mixture of German and Yiddish.

During those early weeks, I became befriended with the Russian teacher, who might have needed me more than I needed him. Never the less, he made sure that I knew and understood the lecture before it even started.

As in every group of students, there are some who show more promise than others. Out of the hundred and twenty, they picked out thirty most promising, the rest were divided into navigators, mechanics and some other specialized trades. I was assigned to most preferred. Captains.

Out of the eight hours of daily lectures, four were taken up with Italian, and slowly we began to master the language. The only draw back was the fact that the moment the classes were over, we used to revert back to Yiddish between us. Since we were quite busy during the week, we hardly left the school grounds. The only bit of free time we had to ourselves was on the week end, when we used to go into the town for a short visit, as we had to be back for meals, unless one did not mind missing it.

I remember on New Year's Day 1946, a group of us took a walk along the sea shore away from town. The shore was not sandy but covered with small pebbles. We could have been a couple kilometers from Fano. There was not a soul nearby we decided to take a swim. I remember remarking; "Where in the world could I imagine swimming in the sea on January 1st." It must have looked strange to the local population, for they were staring at us from the distance.

Friday afternoons, I with some of my friends used to go to the wharf, watch the fishing fleets returning from the sea with the catch.

This little town Fano must have been the docking harbour to some twenty schooners. They ranged from fifteen to twenty meters long with a displacement from thirty to sixty ton, more or less. Standing at the very edge we could see clearly what was taking place. After tying up the boat, we used to see on the deck a box full of small octupus. One of the crew, of which there used to be between ten to twelve, would divide the contents into as many parts as there were crew members. The crew used to come over, one used to turn around while another would point at a portion and ask; Who for?

the one who was turned around would call out the name of a crew member. In this way, the lot of the octopus used to be divided among the crew member It was very much reminiscent of our dividing the bread in Sosnowitz. The crew used to take their 10-15 pounds of octopus and go home for the weekend.

We used to get permission to come aboard to see the catch, and I must admit that I was disappointed. Most of the time there was not more than two tons of fish. This had to pay for the fuel and food for the trip. The owner of the schooner had to get paid for the use of the schooner and whatever was left, if anything, was then divided amongst the crew.

I remember thinking then, how can they exist? How can they live and support a family? They used to leave home Monday before sunrise and return Friday late afternoon. All for 6-8 kilo of octopus. I was hungry myself. Yet felt sorry for those Italians and sympathized with them.

Coming from a part of Poland where most of the terrain was covered with forest, an abundance of all sorts of wood, I was watching the boat builders in Fano selling the pieces of wood and wood chips by the kilo and wondering if this poverty has always been here or is it a result of the war?

Of the life that was going on, and around the wharf, I was not envious of.

We the privileged ones that were picked for the captain course were kept busy with studies or shall I call it homework. In the second half of January, during a lecture, we began to talk of what is waiting for us after graduating this four year captain course. The instructor answered quite honestly, that our captains papers (ticket) will entitle us to command a boat or schooner the size of the ones we saw in the local harbour.

The bubble had burst. Our dream of commanding a Queen Elizabeth had in a second evaporated. The life we had envisioned was in stark contrast to the reality we saw on the fishermen's wharf in Fano. The idea of staying away five days and nights a week from a home, that some day we hoped to build did not appeal to any of us.

Shortly afterwards, some of us began to leave and return to the refugee camps they came from.

My Russian instructor tried hard to persuade me to stay on. Even promising me that by the time the course will be finished, I will know everything he knows, and that I should not squander such an opportunity. I knew he was sincere and meant every word he said, but at twenty two, to spend four years with the promise of becoming a fisherman with the pay of 10-15 pounds of octopus per week, did not appeal to me.

In a group of about half a dozen we left. Still enjoying the privilege of traveling on trains for free we came to Rome. We registered in a refugee camp which was on the premises of "Cino-Cita," the place where Italian movies were being produced before the war. A large place with some hangar like buildings surrounded by a high fence. A gate led to the inside. At the gate a guard house manned by unarmed police from among the refugees. They were husky men from Yugoslavia who like others from central and eastern Europe, were afraid to go home for fear of prosecution for collaboration with the Nazis. Yet despite their doubtful status of refugees in the eyes of the Italian hosts, and plain Nazi collaborators in ours, they looked at us survivors with an air of contempt, reminiscent of the days they wore their "Ustasha" (Croation Nazi party) uniforms. I had the feeling that they would react even with violence toward us were they not afraid of our numbers or reprocausion from the authorities. In those hangar like buildings, that were movie sets, were quartered thousands of refugees of all nationalities in Europe. I doubt if anyone knew exactly how many were there. The hangar floors were covered with rows of cots from wall to wall. As new comers, we received a blanket to cover our self with. Nothing else.

Understandably those huge spaces could not be kept warm even in an Italian winter, so there was no attempt made to do it.

We used to line up for our morning bread and coffee, our soup at noon and bread and coffee in the evenings. Because of the cold, we did not undress, except for the shoes which were kept in the knapsacks under the head.

Waking up in the morning due to the cold that affected mostly my feet, I used to put on my shoes, run outside to shave and get washed at an outdoor facility. Then, get the morning bread and coffee and with the group, start walking the streets of Rome.

In that week I spent in Rome, I have not been warm even once, and when one is cold and hungry, one does not appreciate beauty.

Despite all this and despite the fact that I come from a small Eastern European shtet and never had a chance to see or learn about architecture or to be introduced to its beauty, I could not help but notice the beauty of its magnificient palaces either the splendor of its villas and edifices nor the grandeur of its monuments. There and then I made myself a promise to come back someday to look at it on a full stomach.

The empty stomach was the best incentive to make us return to the camps on the Italian heel. The trains ran very irregularly and the trip took two days.

Arriving in Otranto the last station closest to my camp, I had to continue on foot the last eight kilometers to St. Marina De Leuca, carrying a knapsack on my back. Walking through the twisting short streets, I became aware of the noises coming from the open doors or windows of the surrounding houses. Coming into the house in which I shared a room with Bliskowski and Bluestein I passed through a room occupied by a few other boys. They seeing me jumped at me with yells of joy as if a long lost real brother had returned. Half following and half carrying me they came into my room where my primitive cot or bed was still waiting for me and so were my two roommates.

What struck me at once was the loud conversation and what seemed to me a bit crude, even vulgar use of the language. I had to stop and think for a moment until I realized that they did not change, it was the language they and I used before my departure. It was I who has been exposed for some ten weeks to a different environment, that I have forgotten what it was like earlier.

The ten weeks where I have spent eight hours a day at school and the rest of the evenings doing home work, constantly conversing with people who are trying to improve themselves and learn something from their teachers, who are trying to impart knowledge, where one tries hard to be worthy of the education one received, where utterance of a rude or coarse word would be an embarrassment or loss of face to say the least. One easily can, if he tries, to improve oneself in such an environment. We tried and we did. I noticed the impact the ten weeks away had on me and began to have regrets for leaving the school.

After the excitement of my return quieted down and the three of us roommates remained to ourselves, we began to exchange news. My friend Leibl Bliskowsky had good news for me. In my absence a letter arrived for me from my Uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach, my mother's oldest brother.

Here I would like to go back a few years to January 30th 1943, on the Saturday morning in ghetto Pruzany when I left my family never to see or hear from anyone again. They were getting ready for the Germans to come for them, and my mother went out with me on the porch to say good bye to me. Almost the last words she said were, "Go my son. Hide. Maybe by some miracle you will succeed to avoid the Nazis and survive the war. If with G-d's help you will; make sure to get to my two brothers in N.Y. and tell them what transpired. How we lived and how we died." Here she told

me the address of her oldest brother Shloime (Solomon). 2133 Daily Avenue, Bronx.

During my stay in Auschwitz and the other camps, the name Bronx was replaced in my memory by Brooklyn and the couple letter wrote after the end of the war either got lost or one was returned to me back in Italy.

While there were some American troops in Europe, many of the Jewish soldiers used to visit the refugee camps and take names and addresses to relatives in the U.S. I am sure I gave my uncle's name and address too.

Somehow my uncle Shloime (Solomon) found my name in a Jewish paper and sent a letter to me to the Milano Jewish community. They forwarded it to St. Marina Di Leuca.

My good friend Leibl Bliskowsky, knowing the importance of such a letter for me, opened it immediately. The exact contents of the letter I no longer remember. However, I remember what Bliskowsky told me; according to the letter, it was not the first one my uncle wrote to me. After expressing his joy that at least one of the entire family survived, he can not wait to see me, but in the meantime I should let him know what I need. Bliskowsky did not bother to write me. But instead answered on his own. As for my needs, he wrote: He can use everything that starts with an "A", meaning everything.

In the beginning of 1946 mail traveled slowly across the Atlantic. I am not sure if air mail existed in those days for civilians. It took a couple of months until I got a reply from my uncle to my letter sent to the correct address this time.

Not all of us survivors were willing to sit in the refugee camps and exist on the meager food ration allotted by the UNRRA, nor was it pleasant to walk around day after day and month after month in the same pair of pants or the same shirt on your back. Like in my case, when I washed my pants I had to wear my swimming shorts for a few hours until the pants dried in the hot Italian sun.

Some, and I would call them the more ambitious ones, began to look for ways to supplement their diet as well as to try and earn a few liras to buy something to wear.

As the saying goes "Where there is a will, there is a way." Some found a way. At the very end of 1945 and early part of 1946 there developed a net of petty dealers from among us who specialized in mostly used clothing.

It originated in Italy where those young men used to buy up German marks, considered by the Italians almost worthless. With the marks they used to make their way into Germany and buy up used clothing. Packing it into

knapsacks, they used to get as close as possible to the Austria-Italian border and at night cross it through the mountains on foot.

It is difficult to understand now, how those young men worked to cross guarded borders on top of the Alps in deep snow with a heavy knapsack on their backs. I have heard rumors that some of them got lost or froze to death in those mountains. Sadly, there was no one to miss them or to mourn them, as they too were sole survivors of entire families.

Once they made it across the border, they used to proceed to Bolonia or even Milano where it was sold to others who used to travel to different towns and sell it there in flea markets.

In the early spring of 1946, I got together with a couple other guys to travel to Milano to buy some of the used clothing and try our luck in selling it. I had to come up with fifteen hundred liras, seven and a half dollars at that time, to become a partner, which I borrowed from Bluestein (for some reason he always had some money) and we set out for Milano.

There was no trouble finding our guys who used to bring the used clothing from Germany. After buying what our money could, we set out back stopping on the way at a town by the name of Lecce, some forty kilometers north of our camp. Lecce was known for its flea market.

I guess we were poor businessmen, for after deducting our investment we were left with nothing and this was the end of my business career.

A few weeks later I received a notice from a bank in Taranto that there is some money for me. I set out early the next morning. First I had to go on foot to the railway station in Otranto. A walk of eight kilometers up hill. From there I took the slow moving train to Taranto. In the bank I found out that my uncle Shloime Auerbach sent me ten dollars for which I was given twenty two hundred liras. I was rich.

Getting on the train which consisted of two railway cars of pre world war one vintage, the car was empty except for an elderly Italian woman. Shortly afterwards, a man of about thirty got on holding in his hand a cheap suitcase. Just before the train began to move, another young man got on. Shortly after we began to move, the two Italian men introduced themselves to each other. After a little conversation, the man with the suitcase took out from his empty suitcase, three small look alike wooden blocks. Each block had an equally looking elastic band around it. Putting a small piece of paper under one of the bands and turning the block with the paper down, they began to play the guessing game of under which block is the piece of paper.

Ignoring for a while their game, I eventually began to look at them and came over closer. Soon I could not resist and pointed to a block under which

I was sure was the piece of paper. The man told me to put up a hundred liras. Before I realized I was in the game. To my surprise, it was not the one that operated the game that was the winner but the other fellow. In fact he seemed to be even compassionate, appealing to the winner to give me some money back, to which he answered that he could have just as easily been the looser. During the game I noticed the Italian woman motioning with her head to me and biting her forefinger, indicating that I should get away.

At the next station, the two men got off. I made myself a promise there and then; Never to gamble again.

Coming back to my roommates I was too embarrassed to tell them what happened and never did.

I find it odd to call the refugee camps in southern Italy "camp". After all they were not like other camps with the typical barracks or even converted military accommodations. Some with fences and so on. We lived in supposedly former villas. True, we slept on so called beds, primitive bunks with no furniture what so ever, outside plumbing and not too much too eat. Yet we could move around freely. Travel right across Italy. The blue Mediterranean at our feet and even a bluer sky above

In those early months of 1946 the camp was beginning to take shape. We elected a so called committee that ran the internal affairs of the camp from a Jewish point of view. True, there have remained a couple dozen non Jewish families, and they were true families, mostly Russians, but amongst them were also Yugoslavians and Spanish. Whoever they were, it seemed that they had a clean past regarding participation in persecution of Jews.

There was a communal bath house, open certain hours of the day for men and certain hours for women. However, spending many hours a day at the sea shore, the bath house was empty a lot of the time. Next to the bath house was a cultural center where we could come in any time of day or evening to read old Israeli (Palestinian) Hebrew papers as well as a newspaper printed in Rome by the Jewish agency, by the name of "Baderech" (on the way). In the evenings we had dances, where an orchestra made up of survivors played. As the large majority of us were men and there were not enough girls to go around, boys used to dance with boys. We knew how ridiculous we looked but it was either a boy or nothing. The evenings had to pass somehow. There was a cultural circle, a theatrical circle and of course each Zionistic faction had its own group of sympathizers and their own activities.

All those mentioned above groups welcomed new comers, in fact soliciting members. From it we can conclude that one could keep one self busy if wanted to. Yet I will admit that the majority did not belong to any particular

group, preferring to attend activities without any obligations, or committments.

Yet there were activities, some in which we were involved directly. Some quarter of a million Jews, survivors of the Holocaust and returnees from the Soviet Union languished in all kinds of refugee camps waiting for a country to open its doors to them. The majority wanted of course to go to the land of Israel, Palestine then and the British closed the doors to Jewish immigration. The only way to get there was by running the British blockade.

The two main reasons that brought us to Italy was our desire to build and live in a Jewish homeland. The second was to try to rebuild our shattered lives after the experience of the Holocaust.

Attempts were being made to smuggle individuals from the camps to embarkation points from where boats used to leave for the land of Israel. Those privileged ones or fortunate ones were informed a bit earlier and taken secretly to a collection points. From there, on the designated hour, they used to be trucked to the boats.

We used to envy those individuals. From my personal experience, I would say that families or partial families that miraculously survived were given preference, and single men or women were left to wait.

In spring of 1946, I succeeded to establish a contact with my father's first cousin, in Netanyah, Israel. Someone I have mentioned much earlier. It was Chaim Shemesh, the very first commander of "Beitar" in Shershev and who left for the land of Israel in1932. His girl friend, Sonia Pinsky, followed him three years later. After they married, she came for a visit to Shershev with a year old baby girl "Lau". Mother and daughter were permitted to return to the land of Israel.

The second family was the family Zeev (Velvel) and "Sheine-Rachel" Chmelnitzky. Sheine-Rachel was my mother's cousin. They moved to the land of Israel in 1935.

I remember receiving a letter from Sheine-Rachel telling me to get in touch with a member of the Jewish brigade, by the name of Kirshenbaum, who was stationed in Milano. Kirshenbaum hailed from Pruzany and came to the land of Israel as a "Chaluz" (Zionist pioneer) some years earlier.

Again, the long trip to Milano and finding the base where members of the Jewish brigade were stationed. I did find him. I am not sure what I expected from Kirshenbaum. Maybe by magic he will pull out from his pocket a permit to go to Israel.

This was not to be. Instead he showed me a letter from the Chmelnitzky's asking him to get in touch with me and help me financially. I still remember the wording: "Give him as much as he wants if he will only take it."

I felt proud of such a recommendation, I thought to myself, after all, they are my second cousins only. They left Pruzany in 1935, when I was only 12 years old. Besides, they did not even know me personally. They, living in Pruzany and I, or we in Shershev. In the ten years since they left, I could have grown into a crook, cheat or worse. Yet they had so much trust in the family tradition that they were giving me a blank cheque.

I could have used then a few pounds, dollars, or liras. Still I was so overwhelmed by their trust, that I refused to take anything from him.

Kirshenbaum looked at me not with so much astonishment as with incomprehension, saying; So what am I going to tell them?

In one of the letters I received from the Shemesh family, in fact their letters were usually written by both of them, each had something to say. I was told that in my camp, that is in St. Marina de Leuca, there was a family by the name of Birger and that they have five British pounds for me.

I knew the family Birger. Rather of the, so had everybody else. Firstly, they were an intact family. A father in his fifties and a wife. A soon about thirty with a wife and child. But this was not the main reason for their reputation. It was the son. Built like a wrestler. It was said that he was the pre war heavy weight boxing champion of Lithuania. The family survived in the forest or hiding. I do not remember.

The older Birgers, had a son in Nethania where the Shemesh family lived and through him they sent that five pound over.

Once the money was in the camp, I swallowed my pride and accepted it.

For lack of anything better to do, I tried to pick up a few English words, as well as to go back to my childhood violin playing in which I did not have much success.

Sometime in May or June 1946, my roommate Berl Bluestein, coming from a meeting of the camp committee, in which he was a member, tells me that the camp store needs a man who knows some English and that maybe I should go over to apply.

The camp store was the warehouse where all the supplies for the camp used to arrive and be divided up amongst the different groups.

In charge of this storehouse was a American sargent who did not seem anxious to go back home and transferred himself to the serviceof UNRRA. We believed that he was born in some province of Yugoslavia and came as a teenager to the United States, for he spoke some sort of Yugoslav dialects,

even a fairly good Italian. He was not known as a sympathetic person and was quite abrupt, at times outright rude.

Continously in need of a few liras, I went to apply. The warehouse had a little office for that American and in front of the office a line of people was formed, applicants for the job.

When I finally came in, he spoke to me in English. The whole interview took maybe five minutes and I was sent away. Next morning I was told by a messenger from the community, that he wanted to see me.

This time he started to explain what is required of me by showing me the books and how it is done. He realized shortly, that half of what he was saying went right over my head. He switched to Italian using some Slavic words as well as German.

I must have shown some signs of comprehension for after a while, he called in the man whom I was suppose to replace and told him to teach me the rest. That man remained with me for two weeks in which he taught me the book keeping needed in the warehouse.

He was a German. One of the two in the camp. He was very polite, in the mid twenties and very helpful. One can imagine the questions we had regarding those two, but their politeness (which we certainly lacked) and willingness to help was so disarming, that we could not muster the courage to ask them point blank what was their role in the war.

He, the one whose job I was taking over, could talk about anything. On my question where he was during the war? He told me that he studied in Greece. In fact he spoke a fluent Greek. He used it in dispatching the truck drivers among whom there were some Greeks. In answer to my second question. Why he is leaving the job? He answered that he can not put up with that American ignoramus any longer.

Even now, I can not believe that those two Germans, in the mid twenties, healthy specimens, were studying during the war. Yet they were too intelligent and educated to be ordinary soldiers. I wondered what secrets they carried.

The warehouse had two sections. The larger one was the food department, where half a dozen trucks belonging to the warehouse used to travel some forty-fifty kilometers daily to a place called "Maglie" to pick up the food supply for the camp. The other part was for everything else but food, like soap, cleaning articles, brooms, mops, left over articles yet from the U.S. Army like tents, coats, even bags with chocolate bars that were so old nobody would take them, yet were kept under lock and key.

This, the second part, I was put in charge of. The first, the food part was supervised by a friend of mine, Emil Ettinger, and the responsibility to look after the dispatching of the trucks, was another friend, Zygmunt Suchter.

The building itself was made of stone and was cool in the summer, facing the Mediterranean. In the middle of the building was a large gate, which must have served as an entrance for a vehicle, but now it was the only entrance to the storehouse. There were some 8-10 workers in all. Some I can still remember: Moishe Pencak, Max Potashnik, Chaim Shindler, a certain Lolek, a certain Lifshitz and Feinbir.

Our job consisted in receiving the daily allotment of food and divide it up according to the number of souls in every group or unit. Like the so called "Kibuzim", religious groups, day care centers whose two cooks and managers were girl friends with whom we used to spend time together. Their names were Zena Herman and Irka Piekarczyk. Afterwards the trucks used to deliver it to its destinations.

Special rations used to come for the allied employees of the camp, which were a whole lot different than for us refugees. We, who worked there could only look at it and feel our mouths water.

Our initial pay was three thousand liras per month, some fifteen dollars. Just for comparison one could get a pair of U.S. army pants for a thousand liras, or a pair of shoes for fifteen hundred liras, or a kilogram of bread was one hundred liras. This way one can assure himself of a full stomach all the month round.

There were many possibilities with three thousand liras a month for us survivors, whose dreams for years was the immediate full stomach and second, to come out alive.

There were other fringe benefits. Not the most honorable in normal times and years of plenty, but before one decides to pass judgment, let one put oneself in our shoes and go to that time, if one really can.

Those benefits were; if a shipment of fresh fruit or vegetables arrived and those working around it were tasting or eating them, which was against the rule, we, the supervisors, not only condoned it but joined them.

At times we used to receive shipments of fresh meat. We, not only the workers, but everyone in the camp, suspected some irregularities concerning the meat. At the beginning it used to be the well known Australian sheep, which used to arrive frozen. But later on, instead of the sheep, we began to receive half carcasses of slaughtered local oxen.

Those oxen were used in southern Italy as beasts of burden, and after they have out lived their usefulness at the end of their lives, they would be

slaughtered for meat. I have never in my live seen meat like it, nor ever since. It was like chewing rubber literally.

No matter how long it was cooked in the camp kitchen, the small pieces that we received in our soup had to be thrown out. I know for a fact that it used to be cooked for 6 hours but to no avail.

Keeping in mind that this meat was being fed to young people with good teeth and huge appetites who have only recently eaten grass, clover leaves, rotten raw potatoes, water logged coal and alike, (here I am speaking for myself), yet could not chew it after 6 hours of cooking. Nobody will convince me that the Italian ate it. Unless it was ground up and used in some sort of sausage or bologna.

It was our believe that somewhere along the way from port or ports to the distribution centers, the Australian sheep were substituted with for the local unfit for consumption oxen carcasses. We were also sure that some in the high ups of the UNRRA organization in Italy who were Britishers or Americans, were involved in that switch.

We, as refugees and survivors did not dare make a fuss over it. As the saying goes; "You do not look a given horse in the mouth."

Sometimes we used to get in a truckload of fresh fish from the distribution point in Maglie. They were supposedly freshly caught, but by the time they used to be delivered from the net to the distribution point in Maglie, where they waited for the trucks from the fifty kilometers away refugee camps to come to pick them up and the actual trip to the camps, all this without any refrigeration and in the southern Italian summer sun, I think the best way to put it would be that "we could smell the fish before we could hear the approaching trucks."

In my writing I put in several events that have nothing to do with my story. I mention them, for they are part of the events of that time, regardless of their insignificants or importance.

One day, an acquaintance of mine tells me that there is a woman in a certain house who wants to see me and if I would not mind to come over. I was curious to know what would a complete stranger want to see me for.

In the evening I came over. In that big house with many rooms all occupied by refugees, I was directed to her room where I found her alone. A woman of about thirty, average in physical appearance, medium height, not thin nor fat, not beautiful neither ugly. An average woman.

After asking me to sit down she says to me; Are you from Shershev? Yes. Did you know the Family Krugman? Yes. What were their children's names? I started from the oldest who was my uncle Eli's age, was drafted in

the reserve in March 1939 and who did not return to Shershev but during the Bolshevic era, kept on writing to his parents from Warsaw asking them to send parcels to his former boss in Lodz, now in Warsaw. I said; Sloime, Mulick, Chaiya and the youngest Tevyeh. Then she says: Do you know what happened to Shloime? As far as I know I said, he was in Warsaw in 1939 to 1941, and that is all I know. Did you know that he was married? Yes, I knew, as far as I remember he married in 1938. After a minute's silence, she said to me; I was his wife.

I must have spent two hours there that evening. I found out that with the capitulation of Poland, he, Shloime, came for her to Lodz and shortly afterwards they moved to Warsaw where he became a policeman in the ghetto. A couple of months later, his former boss and family moved from Lodz to Warsaw, where Shloime, her husband, began to visit them very often. Unknown to her there developed a romance between him, Shloime, and his former boss's daughter. Now it became clear to me why Shloime kept on asking his parents to send parcels to his former boss and not to himself.

Eventually she found out about the affair between her husband and the boss's daughter. Life between the two of them became strained. It got so far that they decided to commit suicide together. However, he backed out at the last moment. They split up. She succeeded to get out of the ghetto in the fall of 1942. He remained as a policeman up to the ghetto uprising and apparently perished with the rest of the ghetto's police when the Germans had no more use for them.

I mentioned the above episode for I feel that the family Krugman deserved to be noted when one speaks about Shershev. For the above episode about Shloime Krugman, who was the son of Chatzkel Krugman who initiated the thought, the concept of a Hebrew school in Shershev right after the first world war and saw it come true in 1925. He remained the school's main person of authority up to 1939 when the Bolshevics came and closed the school, as Hebrew was forbidden in the Soviet Union.

I am writing about a period in time in an era when the world, in particular Europe, was trying to come to grips with the after math of the second world war. For us Jews, it was a calamity from which the Jewish people of Europe would never recover for with the destruction of central and eastern European Jewry, we have last the users of our Yiddish language and what's more, the creative source of the rich and diverse Yiddish literature. It is as if the womb of our people was wrenched out.

Jews all over, or what have remained of our people across the sea or in the land of Israel, have united in the attempt to ease the pain of the quarter of a million surviving Jews, who were languishing in hundreds of refugee camps across Germany, Austria and Italy, by trying to find for them permanent homes.

The liberators, or conquerors or allies, whatever one wished to call them, were quite content to let them be where they are rather than to open their own doors to them. For appearances sake, the United States let a trickle of survivors in with no effect on the total sum what so ever. The majority of the survivors were trying to get to the land of Israel (Palestine at that time) but, as I mentioned earlier, the British were dead set against it.

Abandoned by the world, all we could do is beg, but nobody heard nor listened. So we became vocal by marches and protests.

It started a period of protest marches in every refugee camp including ours. Not a week went by without one. There was no shortage of leaders from among us. Capable, intelligent, educated and dedicated survivors of the older groups. People of the age from thirty to fifty who managed to get an education before the war. Yet we got a boost from another source. From the land of Israel.

Some of the former members of the Jewish brigade who volunteered to stay behind to prepare us to the coming struggle with the British in entering the land of Israel. As well as to the life in there. Others came from there as volunteers for the UNRRA, to help out the refugees, but also with another secret mission to organize and work with the "Bricha", the secret organization whose mission was to smuggle us refugees into the land of Israel.

The British knew the purpose of their being in the camp and were not happy with them, but as volunteers, they did not get paid and as qualified counselors and educators, they replaced highly paid UNRRA employees. By it, saving the UNRRA money.

I recall the first one, named Arye, a young man of 27-28 years, well built, an excellent athlete, who used to take out a large group of us every morning for exercise. In reality, he had much to do with the illegal activity "Bricha" (smuggling of survivors to Israel). He used to come to me at work asking what was there new in my department, so he could write out requisitions for it, supposedly for the camp, but I knew that truck used to come and take them away to the embarkation points for use on the boats carrying the illegal refugees to the shores of Israel.

His replacement, by the name of Shwartz, was always dressed in his military uniform. In his thirties, an exceptionally bright and smart man, besides a good conspirator.

I know for a fact that when four Italian sailors were arrested by the British at an embarkation point and put in an Italian jail near Maglie, he, dressed in a British officer's uniform, came to that jail with forged papers and took those four Italians with him.

The British conducted an investigation but never found the impersonator or culprit nor the four Italians. There were rumors of other such feats attributed to him but the one I mentioned I know for a fact.

That fellow Shwartz, was replaced by another Israeli with the name of Nisht. Born in the eastern Polish shtetl "Krinky", he went to then "Palestine" as a pioneer where he studied and became a teacher. When he came to our camp he was in his fifties, to old to perform the feats of his predecessor. However, we soon found out that he possessed other qualities that made up for the disadvantages of age in comparison to the two previous ones.

Up to that time I have never met a smarter, more intelligent, more understanding and above all, a wiser man than he was. When he spoke, one would not dare to interrupt the flow of wisdom coming out of his mouth. I often used to think that if I had the time and would not be embarrassed, I would follow him with a notebook, taking down everything he would say.

Despite the fact that he and I were on the opposite poles of the Zionistic movement and I never won an argument with him, I loved to listen to his sensible articulation of his convictions.

His wife joined him shortly after his arrival. An erect, tall woman with a handsome face. Together they made an attractive and imposing, to us, elderly couple.

They too, did not remain more than a few months in St. Marina di Leuca.

It was a year and a half later, that we have heard that their only child, a son, was killed by the Arabs in the battle for "Gush Etzion," the four Jewish settlements some five kilometers south of Jerusalem.

Shortly after this news, I was in Rome to pick up my visa for Canada. As I was coming out of the Canadian council that was situated in a large office building, right across the hall on a door I noticed a metal plate saying, "Director Nisht." It gave his first name, too, but I no longer remember it.

My first impulse was to go right in. Then I remembered that only a month ago he lost his only child in defense of a Jewish homeland. How could I, single young and fit Jewish man with no responsibility for and to anybody, who have lost his entire family because we had no home to run to, can

abandon his dream, his belief, all his slaughtered family stood for, and go to Canada, while his brethern in the land of Israel are getting ready for the onslaught of five Arab armies, who not only want to prevent the creation of a Jewish homeland, but getting ready to annihilate the entire Jewish population there?

I could not face him. With a feeling of deep shame. Worse, betrayal, I turned away.

It was only on our first visit to Israel, as Ruth and I sat at a sidewalk café on Disengoff, that I said; "I was sure that I would recognize many faces passing by. There were so many people I knew that went to Israel, yet we are sitting here half an hour and not a single familiar face."

No sooner did I say it, when I see a couple walking by. The woman was a stranger but the man was very familiar. I grabbed Ruth and we followed them for a dozen meters.

Assuring myself that this is the man, I overtook him, but before I had a chance to open my mouth, he said "Moniek" (the name I was called in the refugee camps.)

It had been nineteen years since we saw each other last, yet this man, now in his seventies remembered my name. The woman by his side was not his wife, so I concluded that his wife passed away.

I have found out that he was an Israeli ambassador four years in Poland and as many in Romania. He spoke with pride that her personally handed over to Jews of those two countries 40 thousand papers to go to Israel, and remembered most of their names.

We use to see him on later trips to Israel but this too had to end. This deserving, devoted son of Israel. Rest in Peace.

Let us return to the year 1946 in St. Marina di Leuca. There we were introduced to a five work day week. As the camps on the heel of Italy were almost 100% Jewish, all offices and warehouses were closed on Saturdays. The same was applicable to the Christian leadership and administration, as the top executives were former allied officers and the administration employees were mostly Italians. All of them Christians, so everything closed on Sundays.

That gave me two full days of free time besides the evenings. The house keeping did not take up any time as our morning coffee used to be picked up by one of us with the bread for the day. Lunch time on the way to our room, I used to pass the kitchen and get our three portions of soup. In the evening, one of us used to go for coffee.

I can not say we dirtied many dishes, so there was nothing for me to do after work. Having received during that time a couple of parcels with clothing from my uncle Shloime Auerbach from New York, I was reasonably well dressed for a refugee. In the beginning I did my own laundry, if one can call it so. That is washed one pair of underwear, while the other pair I would be wearing. But with the receiving of parcels, I had clothes in reserve. I even found an Italian family, a mother with grown children, among many who lived around the villas, who used to do my laundry for a minimal pay. One of her daughters, aged nineteen, used to wait for me often after dark in the bushes that grew around their houses, waiting for a bit of affection.

As the camp took roots, the theatrical group began to put on performances more often. We even used to be visited by traveling Italian theatrical groups. The "joint" sponsored a traveling group consisting of survivors, whose performances were of good quality and they were close to our hearts.

There were a couple professional artists who somehow managed to survive and who were sponsored by the "joint" too. They used to travel from camp to camp to entertain us. At that time, there was no greater delight.

Sometimes in the middle of 1946 we, the workers of the warehouse became qualified as civilians and started to receive a civilian pay, which meant for us, that from three thousand liras per month, we began to receive thirteen thousand and five hundred liras monthly.

I started putting away money. But not liras. Instead, I used to convert them into American dollars.

St. Marina de Leuca had a couple of so called restaurants where one could buy all the cheap table wine one desired, but to eat all there could be found was fried to a crisp, fish or almonds. As the price for wine ran between thirty five to fifty liras a liter, we could afford ourself to go in there for a glass of wine and a half kilo of almonds once a week. The fish was impossible to eat.

This, so called restaurants were part of a dozen or so small enterprises owned by the local Italians. The others were some small grocery stores, an out door movie house and a "café" as elegant as the restaurants. As admissions to the movie house was very cheap, we used to go there every time a new film used to arrive, which happened about every week. The "café house" was near the movie, and the few of us who could afford used to go there for ice cream, which was made on the premises. I, too used to go in there for a treat once in a while, and after finishing my dish of ice cream, wished I could afford another one.

Many of us survivors during that time found and established contact with relative over seas. Like myself, they to began to receive parcels and money from them. No longer was one rich if he had two pairs of pants or three changes of underwear. Some of the parcels contained too small or too large clothing items, which were of no use to us. People began to sell it and in time it became a full time occupation for some of us, by buying it from us and peddling it in the surrounding villages.

Mail service in the after war Italy had finally established itself and I started to receive regular mail, mostly from my uncle Shloime Auerbach, but often from my father's cousin Chaim Shemesh and his wife Sonia, my mother's cousin Sheine-Rachel and her husband Velvel. Both those families lived in the land of Israel. I also established contact with my only aunt froom my father's side. She was Sara Kantorowitz, my father's brother's wife Shalom, who emigrated in the mid or late twenties to Argentina, got married there and in 1930 went with his wife to the Soviet Union, where he died in 1933. She, his wife Sara, returned to Argentina with her infant daughter shortly afterwards. She found me via my father's cousin Yaakov-Kopel Niselbaum, who left his shtetl, Maltch for Argentina in the late twenties. Another one I started corresponding with was my only relative that survived the Holocaust. It was Menachem, now Melvin Goldfarb, the son of Yosel (Joseph) who was my mother's first cousin, who lived in Pruzany. He, Menachem, like me, was the sole survivor of his family.

Meantime, we had been sitting in Italy for over a year with no hope of getting into the land of Israel. The British blockade was getting tighter. The few barely sea worthy boats that tried to run the blockade had little chance of making it.

Some of us began to lose hope. Some courage. Some both. A fair amount of us who succeeded in contacting relatives across the sea began to be tempted to join them. I tried to resist the temptation, holding on to that hope that eventually, I will get somehow to the land of Israel.

I can still recall a letter which I received from my uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach in which he wrote among other things; Remember Moishele, you are all that remained of our family in Europe and all that is left. We want you to be with us. You have suffered enough. As far as defending the "Yishuv" (the Jewish population in Palestine) I had three sons in the U.S. Army during the war and they came back alive, Thank G-D. If need be, I will send them. You have paid your dues. Come to us."

It was not the eloquence of the letter as much as his love and concern for me that moved me and triggered a thought that maybe I should think my plan over.

In the same fall of that year 1946, I recall receiving a letter from Chaim and Sonia Shemesh from Netanyah, Palestine, in which Sonia wrote apparently with some concern for me and my safety; The situation here is getting worse and more dangerous by the day. There is no peace or tranquillity here now and we can not promise it to you in the near future. Should you decide to come, do not expect much, so family and friends will not disappoint you.

Without waiting any longer my uncle Shloime began to look for a way to bring me to the states. It was necessary to make papers with a guarantee that the potential immigrant will not be a burden on the government. The richer the guarantor, the better the chances of the prospective immigrant.

My uncle being himself a poor man, could do nothing in this case. So he turned to his nephew Irving Aberbach for help. Irving was a son of my mother's youngest brother "Lippah" who died a young man in the states, leaving behind a wife Becky (Rebecca) and a young son.

In our family in New York, Irving was the "rich" man. He jumped to the occasion and began working on papers to bring me over.

Life in camp became very routine for me and I suspect for others too. The only thing that changed was the weather. November and December, the beautiful blue sky was covered with clouds. Heavy rain at times became a daily occurrence. The inviting sea turned rough and 3-4 meter high waves were pounding the rocky shore continously. Nobody wanted to challenge the hugh waves and be thrown onto the sharp protruding spike like rocky shore.

In those evenings we used to sit and talk about the situation in the land of Israel. About the injustice committed by the world and still being committed towards us. About the open anti Jewish policy of the British government, of hanging Jews in the land of Israel if caught with a weapon, while Arabs get off with three months in jail, if not even being arrested.

And so, in such cold cloudy, rainy and depressing days we said good bye to the year 1946 and welcomed the year 1947,wondering what it held for us.

Already in January rumors began to circulate that there will be changes made regarding some refugee camps in southern Italy. In February, some of the neighboring camps were being transferred. Neighboring camps like St. Cesaria, St. Crocce, St. Marina De Bani, were being slowly moved further north. Two camps that housed non Jews were being emptied. In fact were already mostly empty. Their occupants, non Jews found the doors of

democratic countries open to them. Most of them left for the U.S. and Canada. Many went to South America and Australia. To enter those countries, a statement that they were anti communists or anti Bolshevic sufficed to be let in. That they were Nazi sympathizers or Nazi collaborators, even worse, that many were murderers who served in the Nazis organized battalions that took part in the slaughter of Jews did not matter.

The two new camps for us Jews were near the port city of Bari. The closer one, only 3-4 kilometers away carried the name "Transit Camp No. 1." The second one, 8 kilometer south of Bari, was called "Palese."

Yet our camp, St. Marina Di Leuca, remained intact. There was talk that we will be left in place.

By the beginning of April, all the neighboring camps were empty. We, in the warehouse were told to make room for a large shipment of food, which began to arrive a few days later. It came from the distribution warehouses in Maglie. As the camps were closing up, there was no need for a distribution center.

The food was non perishable, consisting of canned goods and dry foods, like sugar, flour, cereal and alike. The warehouse was filled to capacity. Excluding perishables, we had enough food to last for the one thousand people in the camp for months.

We were given the impression that we will remain in St. Marina Di Leuca for a long time to come.

From our warehouse, the main distribution centre of food to the different groups or "Kibbutzim" as some were called, used to take place on Wednesdays. Other items, like vegetables, sometimes fruits and fresh meat were distributed whenever available.

Only one week after we have received that huge delivery of food, which could have lasted us for months, on a Thursday morning, a day after we distributed the weekly rations to the camp, there suddenly appeared two military jeeps with 3 British officers in each. Following them, was a convoy of about three doze heavy trucks and escorted by several dozen "Carabiniery" Italian police.

Lining themself up along the street in front of the warehouses, the half dozen British officers coming into the warehouse asked for the manager. We pointed to the office door behind which they have all disappeared

We remained in the warehouse trying to figure out what all this means. After an hour they all come out, including our boss who tells us that those trucks came to take back all the food delivered last week, and that during this week we will all be transferred to the two camps near Bari.

The convoy of trucks came well prepare. Not only with their own police protection but even with their own porters, who started to load the trucks right away.

Seeing the loading is progressing smoothly, the British officers left to look around St. Marina Di Leuca. After all, it was a nice spot if looked after.

As soon as they left, my boss, the manager calls me into he office. Asking me to sit down, which did not happen too often, he says to me: Do you see what is happening? I answer, Yes. It seems that the story of us remaining here is not true. Impatiently, he says: No, I do not mean this. These thirty odd trucks with food are worth in Italy over a million dollars and maybe much more. The whole pretext of this camp staying on was to have been a farce.

Those people, pointing with is head to the door, needed an excuse to write of all this food supposedly as distributed, so they sent it here. Now since there is no more food in the distribution warehouses in Maglie, and the papers are showing that it has been sent to camps, the slate is clean and now they have come to collect the spoils.

I had been looking after this warehouse, he went on, and guarding it to the best of my ability, never touching anything or taking anything that wasn't mine and I hope that you did the same, but to look at this outrageous theft they are committing, makes me feel like a sucker, as if they are looking at me and calling me to my face; You fool!!

For my own self esteem I have to get something, even if it is only crumbs. Go make up a list of one or two groups of "Kibbutzim" that supposedly did not get their rations and come to me with the list as soon as they are back. Claim that you did not have time to do it yesterday.

I have never expected to hear such words from my boss, knowing how he used to check and double check every item that used to arrive. Then after distribution he used to add up every item to make sure that it corresponds with the amount received.

It happened on a few occasions that we were short a couple of kilograms of fruits, to which we used to help ourselves while on the premises. I can still remember the accusing looks he used to give us, especially me, for I was in charge, and had to have kept an eye on it.

I made up a list and as soon as the Britishers returned and went into his office, I walked in and handing him the list, I said; Those people did not get their weekly ration yesterday, what am I supposed to do if everything is being taken away? I said it loud and clearly enough that they could understand. He

looked at me and asked; Why didn't you do it yesterday? You know how busy we were yesterday, there was no time, I said.

He looked at me, then at the list and then at them. They looked not so much at me, as at him and at each other. Their faces could not hide the puzzled nor the suspicious expression, but nobody said a word. He shoved the list almost into my face saying: Go make it up and fast.

I do not know if those British officers believed the charade or not, but even if not, they threw him a bone and did not make a fuss over it.

We put the supposedly order on a side. Before dark, all the three dozen trucks were loaded.

The entire camp came to watch as our hope of remaining in place was evaporating. Despite the fact that we wanted to get out of the camp, we wanted to go to a permanent place where we could start to rebuild our lives, but to be dragged to another camp, which we were sure would not be as good as this one, did not appeal to us at all.

There were some among us who suggested that we should stop them from doing it, but the majority was not too enthusiastic about it. After all, why attack the Italian police that are obeying orders, and who in general were benevolent toward us Jews, and secondly, we are not fighting for our lives, but for a chance to put our heads down. For this it is not worth getting arrested. Certainly not worth getting shot at.

Before dark yet, they all left. After everybody left work, my boss called me in and told me to sell the food we put aside and we will divide the money.

Next morning when we all came to work, I let the workers in on the secret, for I had no idea how or where to sell it. I told them that I am getting half the money and will share it with them. Next day it was all sold and after giving half of the money to my boss, I divided the rest among us. It came to five thousand liras for each of us. Some twenty five dollars.

Meantime our camp was being transferred. We, that is my two roommates Bliskowsky and Bluestein and I were being transferred to transit camp No. 1 in Bary.

My boss asked me to stay on a couple more days to clean up the papers. My two roommates went ahead with a letter from our camp commandant stating that I will come soon, to please get a room for the three of us together. The camp commandant's name was Pringle, a Torontonian.

Some eight or ten of us remained in St. Marina Di Leuca to clean up our affairs. Three or four days later a truck came for us to take us to the new place.

The new camp; Transit camp No. 1 Bari, was quite a different camp from St. Marina Di Leuca. It consisted of a dozen cement block barracks covered with asbestos roofs. Each barrack was partitioned into half a dozen sections by stone walls, and each section was divided into four parts, by a sail clothed like material to the height of two meters.

It left the entire upper part of the walls open to everybody and of course carried every sound right across the barrack. The sail clothed partition did not offer any private conversations and at night, if you closed the light in your part you could see what was going on at your neighbor's section.

Each group of three or four was assigned one such partition. My former roommates Bliskowsky and Bluestein got a room and held the space for me.

The camp must have been a former military base built in a hurry. The dozen barracks were built in two rows, six on either side of the dusty unpaved road that led from the barracks to the entrance of the camp. The camp was surrounded by a barb wire fence and had one entrance. Very much like a camp.

Besides the barracks, there was a kitchen, bath house, a larger building that served as the camp's main office and part of it served as a post office. Yet another building was used as a cultural center, where one could find a daily local Italian newspaper or some Hebrew papers from the land of Israel. A small building served as a canteen which was run by the camp community.

Into this camp were sent part of each of the camps from the Italian heel. Here I met some men who hailed from Pruzany or were in that ghetto. Some were from shtetls around Pruzany like, Maltch, Bialowieza, Gajnovka, Kamienietz-Litevsk, who were sent by the Germans into the ghetto and with the liquidation of the ghetto, they came to Auschwitz.

Some of them I knew personally, some by name only and some not at all. Coming from the same ghetto made us sort of "Landsleit" compatriots. We were around 15-20 men including us three. We made our own circle who got in touch with the "Pruzaner" association in New York.

Here again I must compliment the Pruzaner Association for their help and generousity. Just like the ghetto in Pruzany responded warmly to the plight of refugees that were brought in there, so did the Pruzaner Association in New York responded generously to all the "Landsleit" (towns people) in the displaced persons camp, regardless if they were native Pruzeners or were there only in the ghetto.

During my stay over a year in that transit camp No.1 Bari, I have received twice parcels from the Pruzener community. I cannot make such a statement about the Shershev community in New York.

Our life style changed quite a bit from the previous life in St. Marina Di Leuca. Many of us used to spend a good part of the day at the sea shore. True, not the sandy beaches one sees in pictures, but the jagged rocks of the Italian heel. Never the less, it was a sea shore. We had the privacy of our room and the extent of the entire village to roam in.

Here we were confined to the oppressive heat of the crowded barrack or if one preferred to stay out of the sun, or walk back and forth on the dusty so called street that lay between the two rows of barracks.

Yes we were free to go out of the camp, but we were 3-4 kilometers from Bari, a long walk on a hot day. And what does one do in the city? Air conditioning was unknown in stores or restaurants in the year 1947. Besides, to go into a restaurant, one needed money.

I did manage to save a nice sum since we began to receive the higher pay. In fact I came to Bari with almost three hundred U.S. dollars in my pocket. But without the monthly pay cheque and the temptation of the big city, Bari, it became easy to part with it.

Never the less, we used to go and sometimes get a ride with the trucks that used to supply the camp or even a few of us used to go together and take a "Carozza (carriage) into the city.

The city had a theater by the name "Teatro-Petruceli" where we used to go and see performances and operas for which I developed a taste and in no time got hooked on it and among my peers became a sort of connoisseur. For this honor, I am indebted to a certain Isaak (Itzik) Chopper from the town of Wolkovisk. A man twenty years my senior, who was a friend of my two roommates who were closer to him in age than I. He came to Auschwitz a couple of months before me and despite his age, he managed to survive.

We got acquainted with him in St. Marina Di Leuca. It seemed that he was a man of means before the war, for he used to tell of his frequent trips to Warsaw where he use to attend theater and opera. If I ever was sceptical about his stories, I was proven wrong going with him to the opera. He knew every bar of each aria, and used to notice immediately any wrong note, to which the Italian audience used to react instantly.

Bari, as a city of close to half a million people had its share of movie houses, amusement park and some nice parks. One I remember was a nice park near the water front, where we used to walk in late afternoons and early evenings.

The center of Jewish activity was on Via Garuba, the number I no longer remember. Hardly ever did I go to the city without making there a stopover. One could find friends and acquaintances, catch up on the latest news from

the land of Israel, find out the black market price of the dollar, which I was in process of exchanging into liras, in order to spend it.

From there all official and non official orders regarding the displaced persons camps for Jews used to come out. It was there that the decision of who goes on the next illegal boat to Israel was made and it was there that one could donate a weapon to be sent to Israel. Like myself, who shortly after arriving to Transit Camp No. 1, got a hold of a colt but no bullets. I gave it there, and some months later I donated a twenty two caliber Italian beretta, which I have bought in St. Marina De Leuca, this time loaded.

One of the big shots there was one from our ghetto Pruzany. Who also was a survivor of Auschwitz and was in the beginning in one of the refugee camps in south Italy.

Because of the crowding in the barracks of our new camp, one did not have to go far to look for company. In my barrack, some half a dozen rooms were occupied by a group from a shtetl by the name of Siemiatycze. All former partisans, among them two families, that somehow managed to survive. They had an inexhaustable amount of stories to tell.

I wish I had the talent and time to write about some of their experiences. I sincerely hope that some of them have been recorded somewhere.

One of those in my barracks was Hershel Shabas, whose name is mentioned in the book "The Holocaust" written by Martin Gilbert.

Not from Gilbert's book, but from those very men from Siemiatycze in my barrack did I hear of their exploits under Hershel Shabas's command. They succeeded in placing some families or part families on scattered farms, away from preying eyes. Some of them survived. Among them was a woman by the name of Shifra, with two daughters, beauties, the older one a girl of about twenty two who was already married to that Hershel, the younger one by four years still single, was taking violin lessons and used to come to me to tune the fiddle.

In fact almost all of those in our barrack were former partisans, having belonged to different groups, some strictly Jewish and some mixed groups.

Who can attempt to tell all their stories, that were so full of suffering, persecution, fear, bravery and heroism.

In our camp one of the barracks, the only one that was occupied when our people started arriving housed people of different nationalities which made no sense to us. There were Spaniards, Britishers who claimed to have lived on the Gibraltar and who had British passports, a Russian professor who spoke two dozen languages, even a black American, or at least he claimed to be an American. His story was that while in the army he struck a white

therefore is not allowed to return back home. He could make himself understood in several languages, like Italian, German, French and of course English.

When ever he head a group of people around him, he used to like singing for us that popular then song, "Chatanooga Choo-Choo", which had a nice rhythm and sounded to us so American. He was also a good dancer and girls liked dancing with that exotic stranger at the dances that took place in the camp every month.

Because St. Marina Di Leuca was a refugee camp in name, but in reality it was a former summer resort where we lived in houses next door to the local Italian population or among them, it was impossible to know every one of us refugees. But in transit camp in those crowded premises, we kept on "bumping" into one another and unavoidably met people which I never met before in my previous camp. Besides, there were many from previously other camps.

As my friends and acquaintances in Leuca were mostly former concentration camp inmates, I never had the chance to meet survivors of another category, namely those that survived in hiding, or Aryan papers or better still, in the German uniform as soldiers on the front lines.

Yes, two of them in transit camp survived as Germans. Raised in the same Polish shtetl, they parted ways at the outbreak of the war. Each of them somehow made their way into Germany, claiming to be of German descent. They jointed the German army.

Neither one knew of the other, until by coincidence they bumped into each other at some train shuttling on a forsaken station.

This meeting might have saved both their lives. Why? I asked. Their biggest danger lurked not so much from the fact that they were circumcised as much as from the fact that they did not receive any mail. As expected, the soldiers in his or their detachments used to receive every so often mail but neither one of them did. Understandable, neither had any family alive. They were killed in some death camp or somewhere else. In time, they began to run out of excuses, but since they met, they began to correspond with one another and their problem was to a great extent solved.

There were individuals, part families and whole families. True, very few that survived in hiding on their own, or with gentiles help. Some were hidden in dugouts, cellars, attics and what not. Some have spent in such hiding places, for two, three and more years. No wonder that some of them were affected mentally or physically or both.

I used to see almost every day, two women. A mother and a daughter walking by in front of our barrack. The girl of no more than twenty used to attract attention because of her beauty. Her mother who could not have been more than fifty looked liked seventy. I was curious as to why such a beautiful girl would always walk with her mother and never with a male companion.

After a little inquiry, I was told that she and her mother spent three years in a closet and it must have affected her.

Interestingly, about a month later in the "main" street of the camp, I was approached by the mother of the girl with these words; I have heard good things about you. May I speak to you confidentially? Sure, I answer.

She took me aside and began to tell me all her history and all that happened to them during the war. Telling me about their being hidden in a closet for three years, and how it affected her daughter. Her fear of people, of crowds. Her distrust of everybody. After telling all this, she turned to me with a favor: Would I mind going out with her daughter one evening, at the same time hoping she is not imposing her daughter on me. She only hopes that by being in the company with a young man, she will come out of her shell.

I gladly agreed, looking forward to spending an evening in the company of a very pretty girl. Now, her mother says to me, having arranged with me the date, she will have to persuade her daughter to go with me by herself. She said that she will let me know when to come for her.

A few days later, the mother came to tell me to come that evening.

I came to their little partition in the evening not knowing what to expect.

To my surprise, everything was quite, to my invitation for a walk, the girl got up like an obedient student and walked out with me. We walked for a couple of hours up and down the main track of the camp. From the gate to the back fence, which served as the walking promenade for the camp inhabitants.

I soon found out that despite the fact that by my side is a beautiful twenty year old woman, I am dealing here with a naïve, sincere, fifteen year old pre war, very innocent girl, with whom I had no intention of getting involved.

Here I mentioned a couple of the large variety of actors or shall I say broken lives and souls that made up the diversity of the denizens of the post war refugee camps.

The second refugee camp, to which many of us were sent from the Italian heel was "Paliese", eight kilometers to the south of Bari. This camp was larger than my "transit camp", both in number of refugees and in space.

Unlike my camp that must have been built shortly before or early in the war for Italian servicemen, "Paliese" was put up by the allied forces after taking over southern Italy. Those were small barracks of about three meters wide by ten meters long, divided half way in the middle, forming two rooms of five by three meters in size. The entire barrack was made from corrugated asbestos sheeting, and dispersed in a large olive tree plantation, like cabins in a small forest. In its favor was the fact that it was situated on the shore of the blue Adriatic with its clear inviting waters. To "Paliese" went quite a few of my friends and acquaintances, among them Zygmund Suchter, Max Moneta, his then girl friend, Irka Piekarczyk with her married sister and husband, Moishe Pencak with his pregnant wife, who gave birth to a son there and to whose "Brit-Mila" (circumcision) I was invited. My first attendance of such an event since the beginning of the war and I might add, one of the very few that took place in Italy among the survivors in those days.

Sometimes in the middle of 1947, the "joint", the American Jewish Benevolent Organization began to supplement our food ration. As it was not practical to do it every week, we began to receive it once a month. The supplement consisted of a can of evaporated milk, a half a kilogram of cheese and half a kilogram of salted beef. As we three shared our ration, we drew it together. Not having where to store the meat, we used to cook it on a borrowed "Primus" stove at once.

It used to take many hours for the beef to cook and three quarters of it was fat. So our meat supplement lasted for one meal. We have not seen milk in years so we treated ourselves to a feast by pouring the three cans of milk in one large can adding some coco, and boiled up a one time a month royal drink.

With the cheese, we were more frugal and it used to last for a week.

I am not sure how it fell into place, that my roommate Leibel Bliskowsky became the housekeeper in our room. He undertook the responsibility of keeping it clean. Well, there is a reason for it; The important job was to keep the tiled floor clean as it used to get covered with a fine dust every day. The only way to do it is by wiping it thoroughly with a wet rag that had to be rinsed several times while wiping the floor, in order to get the sand out of it. Otherwise, that is if not rinsed, the sand used to be smeared all over the floor leaving marks.

That is exactly what our third roommate Bluestein used to do and no amount of teaching him helped.

Eventually Bliskowsky got mad and told him not to wash the floor. He will rather do it for himself and for him that is Bluestein.

It was only shortly before Bluestein left for Canada that he admitted doing it deliberately in order to get out of this job.

In transit camp Bluestein became the buyer for the camp canteen. His everyday job was to go to the fruit market in Bari to buy fruit for the canteen. Unlike the nearby camp "Paliese", there were no stands or small stores in our camp. The only outlet where one could buy the few elementary necessities was the canteen. It was considered a good job. Besides for the wages, it had some fringe benefits.

While yet in St. Marina Di Leuca somewhere around the end of 1946 or beginning of 1947, I received a letter from a Mrs. Liba Zbar from Kingstone, Ontario, Canada, in which she wrote me that she hails from Shereshev. She was a friend of both of my parents in their and her childhood and adolescent. She left Shershev for Bialistock at the end of World War One, where she married and emigrated with her husband and two children to Canada in the twenties.

She left behind in Sherdshev a mother, and a sister who married in the twenties to Abram Koloditzky. They had a yard good store. In the later twenties, her sister gave birth to a daughter Dvora. (Deborah)

She concluded by telling me that she got my address from my Uncle Shloime (Solomon) and asking me if I know anything about her family she left behind.

I knew them well. They lived not more than forty meters from us. They shared half a big house. The other half belonged to an elderly woman and of marriageable age daughter. The house, like all the houses in Shershev was built of wood, but their store attached to the house was made of brick. He, Abram Koloditzky, was a tall man and as he had a good voice, used to conduct the prayers (Baal-Tefila) in the synagogue next door to us.

Their daughter and only child inherited her father's voice. During the two years under Bolshevic rule, she won the prize as singer to represent Belaruss in Moscow.

As delicately as I could, I wrote to her telling her how and when they were killed in Drohychin.

After some time I received another letter from her in which she asked if she could be of any help to me.

By then I had the papers for American. My cousin Irving Aberbach sent me. According to the information I received from the American consulate in Napoli, I would have to wait for my next to come to the states at least 3-4 years. At my uncle Shloime's suggestopm I asked Mrs. Zbar to try to bring me to Canada and from there I could decide later if I wanted to come to the

states or remain in Canada. At least I would be out of the hopelessness of the displaced persons camp. I would be closer to them and try to rebuild my own life.

By that time my two roommates had their papers too for American. Leible Bliskowsky got his from his uncle, Mr. Bliss and Bluestein from his uncle in Philadelphia, whose name I no longer remember.

As I was writing to Mrs. Zbar to see if she could help me get to Canada, my roommate, Bluestein asked me to write Mrs. Zbar if for the same effort she could also help a friend of mine. Namely him. I wrote. Shortly after, I received an answer from her that she will do whatever she can to bring us over.

At that time the displaced persons camp in Germany, Austria and Italy were bursting at the seams. Millions of people, many displaced during the war by the Germans in central and eastern Europe, and many more from inside the former Soviet Union and now the extended Soviet borders, like eastern Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Rumanian provinces of Bessarabia and Buccovina. Let alone the countries of eastern Europe that suddenly found themselves under Soviet control, like Poland, east Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia. Many of those nationals did not cheris the idea of living under Bolshevism, but many more who sympathized or collaborated with the Nazis out of fear of retaliation sat and waited to go somewhere else.

The few countries that were letting in some refugees, among them Canada, were under constant pressure to let in more and more

The then Canadian government, traditionally anti-semetic and smelling the prevailing mood of French and Waspish Canadians, did everything in its power not to let in Jews. To come out openly a year or two after the Holocaust and say, " We do not want Jews" would be too embarrassing for the Canadian government, using the euphemistic excuse of needing certain skilled workers, tried not to let any Jews in.

It is generally accepted that there are no Jewish miners, so Canadian immigration was looking for miners. It is just by coincidence that many smaller camps around Auschwitz, but affiliated with Auschwitz were coal mines in which only Jewish prisoners worked. A case in point was a camp near Auschwitz by the name of Swientochlowitz, where some three thousand Jews worked in the coal mine, under inhumane conditions. The mortality was high, but the number always stood at three thousand, being replaced immediately by new arrivals.

Those that did not succumbed under those conditions left the camp in January of 1945, in those infamous marches. How many of those three thousand and thousands from other camps that supplied cheap and disposable labor to the mines, survived to the end of the war? No one will ever know.

But some did and they did work in mines. I hope that some of them did succeed to get into Canada. They certainly deserved it much more than those Nazis collaborators who served in Nazi uniforms as their guards.

Having exhausted the displaced persons camp of miners, Canada was looking for lumber jacks hoping that there were no Jews among them. But I knew some that came and worked in the forest as lumberjacks, hiding their Jewishness from their co workers, employers and even government officials upon arrival in Canada, feeling as if they are committing a crime by coming to Canada on a what is conceived to be a non Jewish trade or profession.

It took many of us some time to shake off the shackles of fear and unworthiness instilled in us by the Nazis and European nations during the German occupation.

Having finished with lumberjacks, Canada began to look for farm hands. Knowing well that Jews were not permitted to own land in most east European countries, there was not much of a chance that there are Jewish farmers.

There was a big demand for farm hands in Canada, especially in the western provinces. Christian benevolent associations collected names of farmers willing to sponsor refugees to come and work on their farms.

It meant that any farmer in Canada could sponsor a farm hand or as many as he wishes providing he will give him employment for a year.

There was in Kingstone, Ontario a Jewish man by the name of Abramsky who besides being the owner of some department stores in and around the neighboring towns of Kingston, had a five hundred acre farm near a small town by the name of Picton, some thirty three kilometers from Kingston

Mrs. Zbar asked that Mr.Abramsky if he would sponsor two survivors, to which he agreed.

The wheels of process for my coming to Canada began to turn.

The summer of 1947 was passing by, highlighted by frequent demonstrations against the British anty Jewish policies. Those demonstrations were held in front of the British consulate in Bari. It used to provide a sort of entertainment for the local population, whose sympathy lay with us.

From the two nearby camps, mine, transit camp, and the other, Paliese, we used to come marching a couple thousand strong with large placards in hand

through the main streets of Bari, stopping traffic and going in the direction of the British consulate. The Italian police never interfered with us until we got to the consulate. By then the consulate used to be surrounded with a heavy cordon of Italian police.

Coming into the square in front of the consulate, our marches used to swell to twice its size having been joined by many local on-lookers and curiosity seekers.

Having come face to face with the helmetted and heavily armed lines of Italian police, we used to yell all the "downs" that came to our minds.

After an hour or so of yelling, our delegation used to be admitted into the consulate to deliver a petition and we used to disperse. We never confronted the local police with violence. It was a mutual understanding. They let us march unopposed through the streets, disrupting traffic. We in turn, behaved civilized in front of the consulate.

What we missed most in transit camp was the sea. It was bad enough to be cooped up in the crowded barracks, but under a constant summer sun of about 35 degrees celcius, fenced in, in the middle of a dusty and rocky plain, after almost two years in Leuca, was very difficult.

True, the city, Bari had its own beach, but for us, it entailed a trip to the city and from there, a tram ride to the beach. A luxury like this was too expensive for the average refugee.

As many of us from the former camp in Leuca were sent to Palesie, it was more convenient for us in transit camp to come on a visit to our friends in Paliese and spend there a day or more, and of course much cheaper. The rocks on the Paliese beach were flat, clean and smooth. The water clear and transparent. There were even sweet water showers on the beaches. All made to serve the allied soldiers and who now left it for us.

Several times during the long summer of 1947 I, too went to Paliese where I used to sleep over a night or two at my friend Zygmund Suchter. We would spend the days in the water or at the sea shore.

In return I used to play host to Zygmund Suchter when he used to come to the transit camp where he had his girl friend Zena Herman, his present day wife.

As we had no spare cot in our room, I used to let Zygmund sleep in mine while I slept on ….

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CH 15

THIS IS THE CONTINUATION OF BOOK 2, STARTING AT PAGE 101.....

As we had no spare cot in our room, I used to let Zygmund sleep in mine while I slept on the floor, exposing myself to ridicule by my two roommates for not letting him sleep on the floor.

In the fall of 1947 the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia became strained over trieste. As a result, displaced people and refugees of Yugoslavian origin or descent in Italy became suspect or worse, "Persona Non Grata."

It must have been in October 1947, as we got up early in the morning, we found ourselves surrounded by Italian police. Very much reminiscent of the old German days. There was a cordon of police around the camp fence, and dozens of them inside. A couple of them at each entrance to the barracks front and back. The few employees of the camp and camp director, a Britisher, who was permitted to move about were surprised as we were. They were going from barrack to barrack telling us not to go outside. All we knew was that the police were conducting searches, but what they were looking for no one knew.

I still had in my possession an Italian twenty two-calibre Beretta handgun and did not want to get caught with it. There was no place in our room to hide it. The stone floor and sailcloth walls did not offer any hiding places. Not being able to take it outside the barrack due to the police at either entrance, I stuck it into the toilet flush box, which was suspended near the ceiling, thus beyond the reach of a human eye, flushing the spare bullets down the toilet.

The curfew lasted all morning. The police finally left. We found out that all refugees from Yugoslavia were taken away. Their possessions thoroughly searched and every scrap of paper taken too. There were organizations that prevailed upon the Italian authorities to let out those who had on the way papers to go abroad. I only hope that the rest of them were let out to go to Israel, after the establishment of the Jewish state.

After this event, there was always a presence of Italian police at the camp gate. True, they did not interfere with the comings and goings of the camp, except the from time to time checking of the "Sengiorno", a paper issued to every refugee by the Italian authorities in 1946, in order to stop the influx of new refugees from Germany. They never came into the camp to check it, but from time to time we used to be stopped by police on the streets of Barri demanding this document.

I will say that the experience with surrounding the camp, the searches and arrest, which were so reminiscent of the dark days gone by, reawakened in us an almost uncontrollable urgency to get to our destination, wherever it might be.

Still there were attempts by the "Bricha". The former members of the Jewish brigade to bring survivors from eastern Europe into the allied controlled Germany, while at the same time smuggling survivors from Germany into Italy.

In the middle of 1947, two such people were brought into the transit camp. They were Gotl Weiner from Shershev. A man some 8-10 years older than I, whom I knew from childhood, who was with his wife, Sara, from Pruzany, both survivors in Auschwitz. They knew each other from beforethe war and got married in a refugee camp in Germany.

As they came to Italy illegally and had no "Sengiorno", they could not take a chance of going out of the camp. To make matters worse, Sara took sick and had to undergo a serious operation.

She was sent to the main refugee hospital in southern Italy, some forty kilometres from Bari. As her husband, Gotl, could not take a chance in leaving the camp for lack of "Sengiorno", he asked me to go and visit her.

Twice a week, an ambulance used to go from our camp to that hospital and I was always in there. I did not understand it then, but with every trip I used to get sick. Yet as soon as the trip was over and I was out of the windowless ambulance, I was fine.

It was only after I came to Canada that I found out that it was carsickness. Yet I made those trips for three months despite the unpleasantness, until Sara was well enough to get back to camp.

Gotl Weiner had two brothers in the land of Israel living in Benyamina. They left Shershev in the mid twenties. I did not remember them nor knew of them. Now Gotl Weiner and his wife were on the way to them. Of course they too had to go the illegal way with the hope of not getting caught by the British.

The situation in then Palestine was getting worse by the day. Well armed Arab bands were attacking Jewish settlements and there were daily casualties. The Arabs were getting their arms from the neighbouring Arab countries, from the trans Jordanian legion that was brought into Palestine and was commanded by British officers, and from the British forces themselves that were stationed in Palestine.

The Jews, being surrounded by Arab neighbours bent on slaughtering every Jew, with openly hostile British forces trying its best to bring the Jewish population to its knees and beg the British government for protection, had no way of obtaining arms for its defence. Every weapon was priceless and the Jews of Palestine began to improvise ways of bringing some in.

A call went out in secret to all refugee camp to contribute any available arms that will be sent to the land of Israel. There were some among us who had side arms, mostly former partisans, but some like me, former inmates who saw no worthier cause than the defence of Jewish lives, to part with their most cherished possession. It is then that I parted with my "Baretta."

A much more difficult task was to get them into the land of Israel. As the only functioning port was Haifa and was under strict British control. Sending them by ship was out of the question. The people involved in it came up with an ingenious idea to seal the dismantled revolvers in tins of canned meat or fish and send them by mail as parcels of food to previously prepared private addresses.

There were much greater fits of ingenuity performed in those days, but others have already written extensively about it.

When the U.N. voted for partition of Palestine on November 29,1947, we in our camp spent that night glued to the few radios available. The next morning the camp community ordered a full barrel of wine to be put in the middle of the camp, free for all to drink. Interestingly, the best customers or celebrants were the couple dozen non-Jews in the camp.

The majority of the refugees in my camp had by that time papers to go to the states, Canada, South America, or Australia. If not, they were expecting them momentarily.

Yet the news of the partition moved us deeply, even though apprehensively. Particularly when the British declared that they will be out by the middle of May 1948. That statement triggered continuous discussions.

I recall staying in a circle and talking about the most pressing event of the day, namely: The future of the "Yishuv", the Jewish settlement in the land of Israel. We must have been deeply absorbed in our discussions, for we did not notice that we were joined by another person that would have been easily noticed.

It was the deputy camp commandant.

He was a tall man of 6 foot 4 inches, with a very Arian appearance. He spoke several languages with a slight Hungarian accent in all of them. Being the deputy to the British camp commandant, we suspected that he was a raving Anti-Semite. Even though he was always polite, yet strict

Our conversation was being conducted in Yiddish, but as the participants in the discussion were from different parts of Europe, the Yiddish took on a German intonation, and he found it easy to understand.

As arguments were flying back and forth he kept quiet for a while, than suddenly he spoke up saying: I do not believe the "Yishuv" (the Jewish settlement) has a chance of survival. It will perish as soon as the British pull out. We looked at him in shock. One, not being able to control his rage, spoke up, despite the fact that he was addressing the deputy camp commandant: Sure, he said, isn't it what you anti-Semites and your British sympathizers were hoping for since the collapse of Nazi Germany? The deputy commandant looked at him with an ironic and sorrowful smile and answered: Don't you think that I too am praying for the survival of the Yishuv, that I too have seen enough of our blood spilled on the fields of Europe. That my heart cried out to those brave defenders of the land of Israel. But we Jews have to be realistic. We have seen how far our optimism got us during the war. To me, two and two is four. How many are we in Palestine? Six hundred and fifty thousand. Men, women and children surrounded by five independent Arab states with a population of eighty million people and five standing well armed armies. What chance have we got?

We stood for a moment dumbfounded, not because of what he said about the chances of the Yishuv, those calculations we had made a thousand times daily ourselves, but about his statement and identification as a Jew. It had never occurred to any of us in the camp that he might be a Jew. And we thought that we were experts at it.

With the results in the U.N. about partition of Palestine into two states, the Arab attacks on Jews in the land of Israel intensified. They began to take place in the cities, on Jewish settlements and on the road. The Arabs were trying not only to disrupt the transportation but also to isolate Jewish settlements and either to starve them out or simply to over run them.

We used to spend many hours at the radio in order to get the latest news. Tuned to the B.B.C. as they used to allot many hours of their foreign program in Polish. We could have sworn that it was a deliberate attempt by the British to antagonize and upset us survivors, knowing that a large proportion of us understand Polish, for their reporting was so clearly anti Jewish and pro Arab that it bordered on the disgusting.

If that was not enough, there was a British controlled radio station operated by the Polish so called "General Anderson's Army" which broadcasted constantly in Polish and

whose bulletins and news reports from the Middle East could have been compiled by nobody but a raving anti Semite.

As the sources of our information used to come from such venomous places, we used to go to the city Bari, for more balanced news. That of course was at the head quarters of the agency on "Via Garuba".

The entire building was taken up by the agency. Many rooms in which the atmosphere was very relaxed. We used to walk from room to room trying to pick up bits and pieces of news that were more encouraging than the ones we used to get from the radio.

Once, while there, I approached a door where a man from Pruzany worked. He held a high position there, but we knew each other well and I was never refused entry to him. This time I was told to wait as he had important business to attend to.

After a long wait the door opened and a man in his mid thirties walked out. Tallish with a military gait. I was ushered in. After a greeting, I said to him: Selick, what the secrecy? His answer was in the Jewish tradition, with a question to a question; Did you see the man that just walked out? Yes, I replied. Well, Zelig said, he is an Italian fighter pilot who served in Libia during the war. While the allied forces were retreating the Arabs killed his wife and children. He sees a chance now to take revenge on the Arabs for the slaughter of his family. He came to volunteer into the secretly forming Jewish air force.

Even for us refugees in the camp, those were trying days. For the Jewish people in general and for those in the land of Israel in particular. Maybe because we had so much time on our hands to think and worry, and because we have witnessed first hand what happened to our people recently, that our concern was so great. In any case our camp was in a state of tension and constant discussions.

The illegal departure of boats to Palestine had intensified. Even though so had its capture by the British navy and consequent shipping of all the passengers to Cyprus. Never the less, it was a conclusive fact that as soon as the British pulled out of Palestine, all the internees on Cyprus will be taken to the land of Israel.

And so the year 1947 came to an end. New Year's Eve we had a party in the camp with an orchestra and dancing. During which there was an incidental shooting of a young refugee of Spanish nationality by an Italian policeman.

It was rumoured that the bullet was intended for a husband of a young Jewish woman with whom the policeman supposedly had an affair. It was never proven and the shooting was declared accidental.

. Early in 1948, I was informed by the Canadian immigration that I will soon be called to the Canadian consulate in Rome to arrange needed formalities. At the same time my roommate, Bluestein received his. Surprisingly with his letter came an immediate call to come to Rome. Within a week he was back with a visa to Canada. Bluestein did not waste much time. He got in touch with his uncle in Philadelphia who was fairly rich and childless, asking him to pay for his passage to Canada.

I must admit that I was a bit disappointed with the developments. After all, it was my parent's friend from way back that originally started the wheels in motion to bring me to

Canada. My roommate was only an onlooker. Now he had the visa to Canada and I? Who knows when I would get mine.

Particularly upset with the turn of events was my uncle Shlome (Salomon) in New York, who expressed the same sentiment as I. He too knew Mrs. Zbar from Shershev yet, and was in contact with her through all those years. However, all we could do was wait.

And wait I did. Yet contrary to the general opinion that waiting is a boring and weary time. That was not the case for me, or for the others at that time in camp. It happened to be for us Jews one of the most critical, tense strained yet hopeful moments in our history. A moment at which one had to be privileged to be conscious of, as well as to be present at. I think that most of us were to a large degree aware of it.

We were witnessing the "Khevle-Leyda". The pains of childbirth of our Jewish old-new homeland.

Events were taking place at head spinning speed. The British were pulling out of Palestine. Everyday clearing out from different areas, handing over their police forts and strategic positions, even their arms to Arabs, while at the same time maintaining their blockade of the shore of Palestine diverting every illegal ship load of refugees to Cyprus and arresting every Jew in Palestine if caught with a weapon.

We, survivors of the Holocaust, could easily compare the actions of the British, with that of the Nazis at the beginning of 1945, when Nazi Germany in its death throes, deprived of its gas chambers were trying to dispose of the remnants of the Jews by marching them to death in those infamous death marches. So were the British dead set to leave behind them the legacy of total commitment to the Arabs, right or wrong. Showing flagrantly its anti Jewish bias and contempt of justice for the world to see.

If the above few lines sound a bit extreme, one has to be able to turn the clock back some fifty years and get into the shoes of a survivor of the Holocaust, who had nobody in the world and the only place someone is willing to extend a helping hand and a warm welcome smile is in the land of Israel. But here again, as a couple of years earlier, an allied power that tried then to hide the slaughter of Jews that had taken place, so it is now literally handing the sharpened knife to the sworn enemies of Israel saying: Here are the tools. We are moving out leaving you a bunch of defenceless Jews. Now go to it.

We stayed glued to the radios day and night. Knew of every Arab attack and every British betrayal. Of the Arabs over running the four settlements of "Gush Ezion", and ensuing slaughter of the British abandonment of the thirty five Jewish doctors to the Arab murderers on their way to the hospital on Mount Scopus, and of many more like it,

We waited almost "holding our breath", for the fourteenth of May, when the last of the British forces will depart the land, wondering and hoping for a miracle.

At the end of April, I received a note from the Canadian embassy to come to Rome for an interview. It was just couple of days after my roommate Bluestein left for Canada.

On the fourteenth of May we, in the camp, shared the excitement with the rest of the Jewish people all over the world.

Enough had already been written about it, so I will just say that we celebrated the occasion the same way as the day partition decision passed in the U.N., with a barrel of wine in the street.

Yet we all remained glued to the radios, knowing that not only the fate of the six hundred and fifty thousand Jews in the land of Israel hung in the balance, but also our

two thousand year old dream of returning to our promised land, and maybe G-D forbid the fate of our entire people.

At the end of May I left for Rome, checking into a private home converted to a small hotel by the name of "Albergo Italia", owned and run by a widowed woman and her two young beautiful daughters. Actually it was not a home but a large apartment with old-fashioned large rooms. Each room held six beds, which during my stay were all occupied. All by us survivors. It seemed that the place was popular with us guys and I am not surprised. I recall being comfortable there too. We have long before forgotten what privacy was, so sleeping six in a room meant nothing to any of us. Besides speaking the same language, Yiddish, we had a common language, a common past and experience. We understood each other instantly, as if we knew each other for years. It was a kinship that it is difficult to understand unless you are one of it. Sadly, much of that had unravelled among those of us that are still around. I am not surprised it's been a long time. The years and the experience of our younger days had taken its toll.

The next day I went to the Canadian consulate where I was given some letters to different medical offices for an array of tests. As well as an appointment with a Canadian doctor for several days later, giving him time for checking my test results.

Those few days I had a chance to walk over the streets of Rome. On the elegant Via Nazionale, look at the fronts of its beautiful shops, the many piazzas, statues, monuments and fountains. I have seen them before but now, I have not even got the visa yet, just the same, I begin to miss it.

On the appointed day I went to the consulate doctor. He had in front of him all the reports. They must have been in order, so he went through the motions of giving me a check up and gave me a couple of sheets of paper telling me to present them in the consulate the next day.

When I showed up the next morning at the consulate, there was quite a crowd a head of me in the large waiting room. I sat down and looked around, expecting to see only survivors like myself. To my surprise, we were in the minority. Most of the potential immigrants were Italians of all ages. That puzzled me, for I was under the impression that Canada is interested in young and able bodied people and here I saw quite a lot of children and elderly and even what seemed to me to be infirmed people.

Some did not spend more than five minutes behind the door. Some a little longer, some of us refugees came out with radiating faces and some with expressions of deep disappointments.

We immediately began to ask them what is going on behind the door and came to the conclusion that politics play a role in receiving a visa. That is if one of us had spent the four years of the war in the Soviet Union, stood very little chance of receiving a visa.

I recall one young man was refused a visa for having lost partly his hearing in one ear due to a blow he received in concentration camp. A second had the same problem with an eye. Another one mentioned to the man who issued the visas, that he had a brother in the U.S., to which the consul or whoever he was said: You do not want to go to Canada. You want to go to the United States. All you want is to use Canada as a stepping stone. We can not allow it.

And so it was for us survivors in those days. A selection of another kind.

When it came my next, I was taken into a small room A well dressed woman of about thirty five came in. Sitting herself down opposite me, she said in German; Give me a short resume of your life.

I told her where and when I was born. That I began school in 1929, what school and to what year. When we got into the ghetto, when we were taken from the ghetto to Auschwitz, when and where I was liberated and where I spent the last three years. The whole story took maybe 3 minutes. The door opened and a bureaucratic (official) looking man came in saying: What is his story? She answered: Very simple. Till 1941 in school. From 1941 to 1943 in ghetto and from then in Auschwitz. Saying this she handed him a folder she was holding in her hands. Taking it from her, he motioned to me to follow him.

In the next room opening the folder which he placed on a desk, he glanced briefly through it, looking up at me once, picked up a stamp and stamped my stateless passport with it. Without a word, he motioned I should pick up the passport, which I did. I said Thank-you and walked out.

This door led into a large corridor with many offices and it was right opposite his door that I noticed the sign with the name of Nisht on it. I have written about it earlier.

The visa was good for three months. Shortly after returning to transit camp, I was notified that passage for me from Genova to Halifax on a ship by the name "Sobiesky" was paid by my cousin Irving Aberbach and that the booking was for the first of July 1948.

I had one month to my departure, but my time and attention was constantly occupied with the events in Israel. I went to sleep and wake up with a feeling of guilt. If I am not being harsh on myself, I would say I felt like a traitor. How many times a day I would chastise myself for going to Canada, while my brethren in Israel are fighting for their and my existence. Only three and a half years ago, I would have been happy and would have felt privileged to die for such a cause. Now that I had the chance to fulfill my childhood and adolescent dreams to stand in line with other Jews in defence of a Jewish homeland and Jewish lives, I am abandoning them to their fate.

True, my uncle used to remind me in his letters, that I am the sole survivor of our entire family and that I owe it to them to stay alive to perpetuate their memory and their name, that they would want me to stay alive for that reason. Besides, wrote my uncle, after what I went through, I more than deserve it.

Never the less, that feeling of guilt had never left me through all those years and is part of the feeling of guilt and remorse, as indelible as the very fact of remaining alive that haunts the survivor.

I had a month before my departure. It suddenly dawned on me that a few of my acquaintances had left the camp during the month of May. After inquiring I found out that they had left for Israel. In fact many left before the state of Israel was proclaimed, arriving at its shores on the day or a couple days after the Declaration of Independence. In the excitement of the last two or three months, I did not notice that some others had left for the states, Argentina and some for Canada.

It was time for me to get ready too. I still had most of the money I came with from Leuca, that my uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach used to send me a few dollars from time to time. As it was as good as a fact in the minds of all eastern European masses that

once you come to the shores of North America one can find gold in the streets, I decided not to come looking as a beggar, but as a human being. I still remember going to a tailor to order a double breasted brown suit. A refugee seamstress in camp made me six dress shirts. In a clothing store, I bought two pairs of pyjamas and six sets of under wear

After much deliberation I bought six Borsolini hats for Mrs. Zbar's family. Not knowing what to buy, I bought a nicely decorated musical cigarette box, a couple cameos and a table lamp made from a large seashell with beautiful carved designs.

Having heard that accordions are expensive in North America, I bought a new one "Scandalli", which came in its own case. Along with it, I acquired two suitcases and got ready for the trip.

Surprisingly enough, I filled up the two suitcases. True, one was full with the presents and my new wardrobe, but the second contained besides a pile of letters from my uncle, also letters from my relatives in Israel, as I do not like to part with any written material that is of sentimental value to me. I filled up the suitcase with some clothes that I received in the last year in parcels from my uncle Shloime.

So here I was, a refugee with two suitcases and an accordion , travelling to Canada

From my traveling experience in Italy, I preferred to be earlier than later, and decided to leave a week before my boat was due to depart. My friend Leibel Bliskowsky offered to accompany me to Genova, which I gladly accepted

That train trip is still vivid in my mind. Those small crammed compartments made for eight passengers, four on a bench, but always ended up with five on each. As farther north we went, and some passengers got off, the new ones that got on were larger.

Somewhere along the trip at a station when some of the passengers from our compartment got off, they were replaced by a group of Italian middle aged and matronly women, who made themselves very comfortable. I knew that if I would get up, my seat would disappear beneath them. So I sat.

One of the initiated a conversation with the two of us. We, being peeved at them for making our trip even more uncomfortable than even before, and not even pretending to notice it, were not inclined to go into a conversation with them. So we pretended to speak and understand even less Italian than we did. All they found out from us is that we are going to America.

That did not deter them from keeping a conversation going between themselves. I hear one saying to the others: Look how lucky those two are. They are returning home to their families and parents. To comfort and riches. And they continue describing life in America as much as their imaginations would permit them

We two are listening to their conversation without uttering a word. I do not know what in my friend Bliskowsky's mind was going on, for he not only lost his parents, brother and sisters, but also a wife and a child.

I felt like jumping up and yelling; Stop talking. I can not bear it. I am not with you think I am. I am not a returning home G. I. I am not returning to my family nor am I returning home. I have neither family nor home. I have been driven out of my home seven years ago and two years later I and my family were brought to a place called Auschwitz where they were mercilessly murdered and now their ashes are fertilizing some Polish farmer's field……But I do not. I sit listening to their conversation of my life. Of the life of my family that could have been. That should have been. But was not.

And so the train rolled on. From Bari to Barletta to Foggia, to Caserta, past Rome, past Civitavecchia. I looked out at the city of Civitavecchia. It was badly damaged either by air bombardment or by artillery. I have never been here before but I knew of it from the late thirties, when the "Beitar" under Zabotinsky established there a marine school for Jewish boys. It took me back a dozen years. How much has it changed since then....

The train continued to Livorna, Pisa, Spezia and finally Genova.(Genoa)

There to, we checked into a similar place (hotel) like earlier in Rome. We slept several in a room. Unlike in Rome though where there were survivors only, here we met Jews even from North Africa.

We got acquainted with one North African family in particular. It consisted of an old patriarchal dressed and looking man of an indefinite age, his wife, who looked much older than her age. The third person of that family was a daughter of about twenty six or twenty seven, and who wore no make up of any sort to hide her age. So judging by the daughter, her mother could have easily been taken for the grandmother, which she was not.

The older couple spoke only Arabic, but the daughter spoke a fluent Italian, as she was born and grew up in Libia. They were on the way to Israel.

The young woman had her hair coloured an unusual red, to what she explained that where she came from, all young women of marriageable age dye their hair this colour as a sign of matrimonial availability.,

Yet she was never out of sight of one of her parents. She would not even be with one or the two of us alone for a moment in the lobby of that small hotel, even in the presence of other guests.

Genova, particularly in the direction of the harbour was not made for walking because of its uneven terrain, especially in late June, so we spent the noon hours indoors, talking with the guests of the hotel. All of them were there waiting for the departure of their boats. A few to Canada, some to the United States, others to South America and still others to Israel.

As my friend Leibel Bliskowsky liked to talk to that Libian girl, and why not? He was fifteen or eighteen years her senior and available. Inescapably I was drawn into their conversation, which was very general and very public.

It was interesting to hear her stories about Jewish life in Libia and their matrimonial problems.

In the evenings we men used to go for walks in the neighbouring streets. What impressed me most was a particular street along the harbour with its bars, cheap coffee houses, and the blaring music from every bar and above all the human diversity. Characters, which I always thought, were fictional, portrayed in movies only.

There I saw them in real life, every bit as exact as in movies and more

I was told that Genova is the largest Italian port. From the top of a rock overlooking the city, it certainly was a huge port.

The day of my departure arrived. Checking out, I paid also for my friend Bliskowsky's stay, despite his objections. Taking a carrozza (carriage), we drove to the port. After paying the coachman my last few liras, I noticed that all I had in my pocket were twelve American dollars, which were at that time on par with the Canadian dollars.

After saying good bye to my friend Leibel Bliskowsky, which was not easy for either of us, for we had learned to trust each other and became good friends during the last five years. In a sense I felt guilty for leaving him behind, while I am going to that "golden land". I went through Italian customs and immigration where they took my Italian residence paper (segiorno) and tried to make me pay duty on the accordion.

Getting on the boat "Sobieski" that had a mostly Polish crew, I stood on the main deck to have a better look at the harbour and city from the ship and wave at the crowd on the large pier, which was surrounded by a marble like stone balustrade. There the only one sitting on it was my friend Bliskowsky.

We were too far apart to hear each other, but we sure could see one another. I did not want to move for fear that he will lose me from his sight and stood there in one spot for a couple of hours, until the boat began to move.

Everybody on shore started waving and so did he, not stopping until he was completely out of sigh. I had the feeling that I left behind one of the best friends I ever had if not the best.

My cabin held eight passengers, mostly Italians. Having deposited my baggage under my bed, I went on top to explore.

There was no trouble to recognize who were the passengers on the ship. We Jewish survivors found each other pretty soon. We soon saw who were the fellow travelers with us.

After some conversations with the crew, who were glad to use their mother tongue "Polish", we found out that there are some twelve hundred passengers aboard. Roughly one hundred in the first and second class and the rest in our third class, among them some fifty Jews.

For supper, which was to me more like a feast, we were ten passengers at the table, and as in my cab, I was the only Jew. The others were mostly Italians, except for a couple who never said a word. The majority of the waiters were Italian and so was ours, which made the whole meal pleasant.

Before midnight, we stopped in Cannes, France, where a part of a "Yeshive" (an institution of higher Talmudic learning) came aboard. Some seventy five young men, all except for a few older men, apparently their teachers or Rabbis. They went down to their cabins from which they did not came out throughout the entire trip. We were told that there was a Kosher kitchen set up for them in a separate dining hall.

It was enough of an exciting day for me and I went to bed before midnight.

Sometime during the night I awoke with a feeling that I am being lifted up and up, when suddenly the direction changed and I was going down. Instantly I had the sense as if my entire stomach is pressing upwards and an uncontrollable urge to vomit over whelmed me. Not losing a second I jumped off my cot and in my underwear and bare feet, I ran to the door of the room, which led to the hallway at which end were the public washrooms.

To my surprise and chagrin the whole hallway was full with people trying to get there ahead of me. There was no way in the world I could make one step forwards. I looked about and saw people unable to keep themselves in control vomiting on the walls on the floor and on each other. I joined them. For a moment I felt a bit better, just enough to see what is going on around. I saw men and women half naked in such misery that they

could not care less how they looked like and I thought to myself: If somebody would take a picture of this and show it afterwards to the very same people, they would be ashamed to appear on the deck.

This thought did not linger long in my mind for the nausea returned with the same intensity.

Needles to say that I did not go into the dining room the next day. That day in the afternoon we passed the Gibraltar. Sadly, I did not feel well enough to appreciate the event.

The following morning when I did show up at the breakfast table, there were three of us including me. I came, but could not eat anyway.

I used to feel better walking on the deck than lying on the cot in the windowless cabin. There on the deck, I had a good chance to see the other passengers or fellow travelers.

Out of the eleven hundred passengers in the third class, I would estimate one hundred and twenty five were Jews, and that included the seventy five that joined us in Cannes. One hundred Italians and the rest were all of eastern European descent, at least ninety percent of them were Ukrainian.

With the passage of hours and days, I began to feel better, maybe because I got used to the motion of the boat or maybe the sea calmed down. Anyhow, I started to come to the dining room for meals. Yet I spent every hour of the day and evening on the deck, going down to the cabin only to go to sleep.

There on the deck I could meet and converse with survivors like myself. Share with them our experience. Even dared to speak of the future, with a good measure of apprehension. But my favourite occupation was to sneak up on those eastern Europeans, whose faces were so familiar to me from a few short years ago, when they wore the Nazi uniforms as watchmen at Auschwitz or as volunteers in the local police or auxiliary police under the Nazis command while in Shershev, Antopol, Drohiczyn, Chomsk and Pruzany. They too stood in small groups or were leaning on the ship's railing close to each other, so as not to have to speak loudly and kept up a conversations.

I was curious to know what they were talking about. While we were telling each other of our suffering and loses, what were they telling each other? How they had inflicted it?

I tried time and time again to pass by such a group close enough to hear something, a sentence even a couple of words, but no luck. They were so much on guard as if obsessed by it. I could only assume that it is for good reason. The moment I came within ear shot, they stopped talking.

Among us survivors, this fact was a good topic for conversation. Others among us had the same idea as I and had tried to overhear something but with the same results.

We were not oblivious nor were we ignorant of the element and moral quality of immigrants that we are traveling with to Canada, and were wondering what moral qualities can they pass on to their children.

Now, over fifty years later, I can say that we were not entirely wrong. Whatever they left behind, this they took with them; their racial hatred and intolerance. Is it because you do not even have to pack it in a suitcase? Not likely. It is in you always, unless you really want to leave it behind or simply get rid of it.

On July 10, we docked in Halifax. We began to disembark right after breakfast. Almost all the passengers got off except the seventy five Yeshiva students, the first and second class and half of the Italian travelers. They went on to New York.

We were told to collect our luggage and line up to be processed at the immigration.

It is not an easy task to deal with a thousand people who do not speak your language.

As if in spite, my suitcases came off the boat with the last load, which caused me to be among the last to go through immigration. The immigration officer began to fill out the questionnaire: Family name, first name, parents names, profession, education. How many languages do I speak? I mention some half a dozen, but not Yiddish which is my mother tongue nor Hebrew. I see the satisfaction on the inspector's face. He is dealing with a literate. After the dozens and dozens of illiterates he has just seen.

After a couple more questions without even looking up, he says to me: You have your train ticket to your destination? I see he is holding the pen to tick off a place on the questionnaire. I answer: No. He looks up and says: Just a moment. He calls over one of the two or three men that were mingling all the time with the eastern European immigrants and says to him: How come he has not got his ticket? The man asks for my name, looks at his list and answers: He is not on my list, you better ask Mr. ---- I do not remember the name, but it was a very Jewish sounding name.

The immigration inspector's face becomes sombre and he says to me very cautiously yet softly, as if probing: Are you Hebrew? I say, Yes. Instantaneously his face turns stern and comes closer to mine. I look at the blond smoothly combed hair and the very light blue eyes. At the face that seemed so friendly a moment ago listen to the words that are coming out of his mouth. You are a Jew!!! It sounded to me like both a statement and an accusation. Yes, I am. I said. He straightens up and starts to walk away saying in a loud voice so that the other inspectors can hear: I got here a lou-lou. He is back within thirty seconds in company with another man. Pointing to me with a motion of his head, he says to the second man; He is yours.

The man comes over to me. I have to look up to him. He is tall. He puts out his hand to me and says; Shalom Aleichem. My name is so and so. I am from "Hias". Welcome to Canada. Outside this building there is a train waiting which will take you to your destination. Saying this, he pulls out a train ticket from his pocket. Handing it to me, he says; Good luck.

At the exit of the building, I am given a package of tobacco "McDonald" and a folder of "Vogue" cigarette paper. Both are still in my possession, over fifty years later.

From the exit door of the immigration office to the train is only a few dozen meters. The train conductor directs me to a coach. Intentionally or not, all the Jewish passengers from the boat are in the same coach. We are excited that we finally came to our destination and glad to be together for a little while longer.

It seems we are on a railroad side line. We are not moving yet and we are getting hungry. Someone had found nearby a neighbourhood store and bought a loaf of white bread paying for it twelve cents. We are impressed with the low price and in no time we are all buying and eating bread.

We move out of Halifax before dark. A conductor comes by to check our tickets.

We try to strike up a conversation with him. He is patient with us and tries too understand and answer our questions. It turns out that I am the best English speaking

person in our coach, so I become the spokesperson for all. There are many questions; How much does a tailor make an hour? A shoe maker? An upholsterer? A hat maker? An electrician? A brick layer? A carpenter? It seems that everyone can make up to four dollars an hour. MY G-D!!! Four dollars means thirty loaves of bread. Who could earn thirty loaves of bread a day in Poland or in Italy? Yet here one can do it in an hour...

No wonder that it's called "The Golden Land." We are too excited to sleep the night. In the morning we all sit by the windows trying to see as much as possible of our new adopted country, which is so vast yet hardly populated.

We travel for miles on end before we see a settlement. In the distance we see four lonely houses. One of us points out the fact that there is a car parked near each one of them. Is there a car at every Canadian house?

The day goes by in expectation and excitement. It is evening and the train still continues to gobble up miles of track at an immense speed.

Shortly before midnight the train stops in Montreal. Here about half of the passengers in my car, all of them survivors, get off. I feel a pang seeing them go. We have become close aboard the ship and more so in the one coach for the last thirty six hours. We felt good, comfortable and safe together. Now in the half empty car, there is silence. I guess we all felt the same way. When the train started moving again, we tried to resume our conversation, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the conductor passed by announcing that the next stop is Kingston, Ontario. My stop. I began to wonder what will it be like to meet Mr. And Mrs. Zbar. The so nice yet to me, total strangers. My, until now total composure, began to leave me and a nervousness even a touch of apprehension started to seize me.

Around two thirty in the morning, we stopped at the Kingston station. Grabbing my two suitcases and accordion in its case, I got off the train into an empty space between the train and station. The conductor got on the train and the train pulled away leaving me as far as I could see alone and lost.

As the sound of the train faded in the distance, I began to hear voices coming towards me from down the railway tracks. In a few seconds I could make out shadows of some people and could discern some words. They were speaking Yiddish.

I was standing under the lights of the station and they were coming out of the dark. I heard a woman's excited voice saying, "He looks just like his Uncle Shevach." This statement caught me by surprise. My Uncle Shevach perished somewhere as a Czarist soldier on the Russian German front. A casualty among many millions in the first world war. My older sister Sheva, was named after him. Where does this so far strange woman know of my Uncle Shevach who was older by a year or two than my father?

As they got closer I could make out in the dark three men and one woman. One of them I recognized immediately by his gait. It was my former roommate from Italy, Beryl Bluestein. The others were Mr. And Mrs. Zbar and their business partner, Mr. Berlin.

After an excited and nervous introduction, we got into their car. But instead of driving to their home in town, we drove to their summer home, or cottage, by a lake side. Every body was tired. I was shown a couch in the living room and we all went to bed.

Despite the long and sleepless trip from Halifax, I could not go to sleep. As soon as I heard someone moving around in the next room, I too got up. Soon everybody was up. It turned out that the cottage held more people than I thought.

The Zbar's had a son. He was a doctor who lived in New York who was visiting them now with his wife and four year old daughter. They also had a daughter who married a doctor who were living in Windsor. They too, with their four year old, was in the cottage. Counting their business partner, Mr. Berlin, my former roommate Bluestein and me, there was quite a crowd. Not to mention, the two maids. One, a young Ukrainian girl who hardly spoke English and the second, a university student who worked in summer to put herself through university.

Despite the fact that all of them tried to make me comfortable and put me at ease, I was not. Even Bluestein's presence did not help. I could only see that the three months since his arrival had no affect on him what so ever and he was still the refugee he was in Italy, which to a degree, embarrassed me.

The cottage was a few years old with running water, plumbing and electricity. A well kept green lawn reaching the lake, some twenty meters away. The cottage was surrounded by flower beds pampered by Mrs. Zbar herself.

Everything looked so beautiful. The cottage, the lawn, the lake, the heavily forested small and larger islands on the lake. The quiet. The family Zbar, their married children, and the two four year old grandchildren, the children's giggles and happy shouts, their parent's laughter and grandparent's joyous and beaming faces. It was not real. It was like a fairy tale. It was so unreal, so out of my world.

Surprisingly, there was no envy in me. The opposite. Gladness for those people that are so nice to me and trying to make me feel at home with them.

Our conversation was conducted in Yiddish. Mr. And Mrs. Zbar spoke as good a Yiddish as if they had just left Shershev. So did Mr. Berlin. Their children and spouses understood almost every word and spoke some.

At that time I was sure that the Zbars and Mr. Berlin spoke to me and between themselves Yiddish for my benefit. After all, they had been in Canada twenty years by then. Today, after me being here almost fifty years, I am not so sure, for I am still more fluent in Yiddish than English.

In the evening after supper unexpectedly arrived Mr. And Mrs. H. Abramsky. The gentleman farmer who was my sponsor in coming to Canada.

Every body was surprised by their unannounced arrival. He was close to fifty. On the short side and average characteristics. She of the same height, a bit plumpish with a strikingly beautiful face noticeable well taken care of.

After introduction and a short chat at which he proved to speak some Yiddish, Abramsky proposed I come to work tomorrow morning on the farm. Despite proposals by Mrs. Zbar to let me stay on another day or two in order to recover from my trip, his suggestion turned into insistence.

I from my side, not wanting to over stay my welcome, agreed to come.

The next morning Bluestein and I took the bus to Picton getting off three kilometres before Picton where the Abramsky's farm was located next to the highway.

The farm consisted of four hundred and fifty acres of land on both sides of the road formerly belonging to 3-4 owners. Their houses still stood, now belonging to one owner. In one lived the manager of the farm by the name of Milan, originally from Slovakia. In the second lived a Canadian family by the name of Robinson who looked after the thousands of chickens and some cows.

On the side, in the middle of an overgrown field, stood a couple of sheds that must have served to accommodate some temporary workers.

In one of them Bluestein was living since he came to Canada three months ago and I moved in with him. The shed had two rooms. The first served as a kitchen and a living room and the second as a bed room that had two single squeaky beds and just enough room for our meagre possessions.

The kitchen had a wood burning stove, a small table and a couple of wooden chairs that were held together with wires.

A few meters behind the weed surrounded shed, was an outhouse and for washing, bathing and drinking water, Lake Ontario was pointed out to me down a gentle slope some fifty or sixty meters away, which formed one side of the farm's boundary.

I changed my clothes and went right to work.

Expecting to work on a farm I was looking forward to it, as I never did this kind of work. What it turned out was entirely different.

The part of the farm that lay between the main road and the lake was unsuitable for farming due to the abundance of all sizes of rock in the ground. In the middle of this land stood a beautiful stone cottage which the owner converted into a summer home for his family. This cottage had all modern conveniences like electricity and running water from a well in the basemen and all that goes with it.

The owner's intention was to extract all the stones from the upper layer of the soil so it could be levelled and seeded with grass, creating a levelled nicely manicured lawn in front of the cottage all the way to the main road. To this purpose there was a tractor hooked up to a plough. After the foreman used to plough over a piece of land, we used to unhook the plough, hook up a big box on wheels. Then the foreman used to drive the tractor and I and Bluestein used to follow and pick up rocks throwing them into the box.

. It was humanly impossible to pick out all the stones from the ground for there were more stones than soil. Some neighbour farmers used to come over to look at us work and say, "this is not farming. It is mining."

The working day used to start at six in the morning with an hour for lunch. Then continue until dusk. Which in July, meant until nine in the evening.

That gave us enough time to cook the fish that we used to catch lunch time and keep them alive in a pail with water until the evening. We were receiving forty five dollars a month payable every two weeks.

The only free day was Sunday, so we used to get up early Sunday morning to take the bus to Kingston in order to spend the day with the Zbars. We would return in the evening.

After having to pay for the trips to Kingston we did not have much to pay for food which we used to buy in the nearby little town of Picton.

What helped us in those days was the weekly visit by the Zbars with their business associate Mr. Berlin who used to visit us from Kingston almost every Wednesday afternoon due to the fact that the stores were closed those afternoon. They used to bring with them baskets full of sandwiches, pies and other goodies.

When they used to come, we used to take off an hour or two and picnic together under one of the many trees.

We knew that we owed all this to Mrs. Zbar's good nature and generosity, for she used to spend many hours preparing all the food, knowing well that it is humanly impossible to finish it all at one picnic. Of course, they never took anything back with them. Leaving us enough food to last for two or three days

Thus we got into a routine. Work from dawn to dusk with an hour's break for lunch. There was no time for anything else, not even to think about the friends I left in Italy. In order to start work at six we were up before five. After a hurried ordinary breakfast of bread and jam or butter that we used to buy in Picton, we worked until noon when we always took a few moments to catch a few fish for supper before making our way to the barrack. We picked up on the way a dozen or so eggs that were laying all over the farm from the thousands of hens that Robinson looked after but could never collect them all.

After a lunch of fried eggs and bread, we worked until dusk and before even returning to the barrack, we plunged into the lake to wash off the sweat of the day.

Having returned to the barrack, cleaned the fish and boiled up a pot full of fish and potatoes, by then it was close to eleven or later and it was time to call it a day.

In those days one could find one or a few Jewish families in almost every small town of Ontario. Picton was no exception.

One Sunday , a man appeared introducing himself in Yiddish. He lived with his family in nearby Picton where he owned a chicken business. He used to buy up chickens from the chicken farmers and ship them with his own trucks to New York.

He drove us over to his home where he introduced us to his wife and young children. During our conversation, I found out that he came to Canada as a young man from our part of eastern Europe. When he found out that we are making forty five dollars a month, he offered me on the spot forty five
per week to work for him and that was besides living accommodations and board. As he said then: You will be able to save every penny of your pay.

To my question why he was willing to pay such a good wage, he answered that he wants me to drive one of his trucks with a load of chickens to New York because his drivers are not dependable. They drank and caused accidents. He knows that Jewish boys do not drink and it is worth it to him.

Oh how badly I wanted that job but I was under the impression that I must stay a year on a farm. Of course it was the wrong conclusion for while it was true that our employer guaranteed the government to keep us employed a full year so we should not become a burden on the government, there was no law that prohibited us from working somewhere else. But we did not know it. So I refused that offer.

The Zbars and their friend, Mr. Berlin in particular could not stand to see us two working twelve-fourteen hours a day, six days a week for a pittance. They decided to do something about it. Assuming wrongly that we have to stay on a farm at least for a year, they reasoned that we could stay on our own farm and decided to help us buy a farm.

We two of course did not have a penny to our name, so they turned to my and Bluestein's uncles. My Uncle having come with his family to the states at the age of fifty did not have any money. Never the less, he succeeded to collect from his children. Three of whom spent the war years in the front lines as U.S. service men and the two daughters who worked in the N.Y. sweat shops. He collected two thousand dollars and sent it to the Zbars. Bluestein's uncle in Philadelphia who was very rich and had no

children, promised to send the same amount too, but never did. However at that early time we all expected his part of the bargain to be kept.

The Zbar's and Berlin began to look in the for sale section of the newspaper for a farm. After looking at a couple farms, they decided on one in a place called Greenbush, eleven miles north of Brockville, Ontario.

It was a parcel of one hundred acres of land, consisting of fifty five acres of arable land, ten of pasture and thirty five of woods. On that strip of land, a quarter of a kilometre wide and two kilometres long stood an old house. A stable for the ten cows and two big horses and a barn. All of them in a run down state.

The house had a kitchen, living room and a bedroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. Next to the kitchen sink was a hand pump that drew water from a cistern located in the basement. The water in the cistern used to come from the rain water on the roof that was diverted to it. In the basement whose walls were of stacked up crude stones without even cement, was a wood fired furnace.

There was a well on a green lawn some dozen meters from the house with a small electric pump that used to pump water into a trough for the livestock. This water was clean and suitable for human consumption.

There were ten milking cows and a team of two large horses. A disc plough and a binder in poor state.

The farmer had just threshed his forty five acres of oats and had half a barn full of straw as well as seven hundred and fifty bushels of oats-grain. There was also four acres of standing corn and four acres of sugar beets to be pulled and taken in. Besides the house, was a vegetable garden with a fair amount of potatoes in the ground.

The farmer wanted to sell it as a going concern and would not let it go for less than seven and a half thousand dollars, which was at that time a high price. They decided to wait a while.

Since I arrived in Canada, I was in constant touch with my uncle Shloime (Solomon) in New York. My family in the states were very eager to see me and decided to send my cousins Helen and her brother Harold.

I remember them when they left Shershev in 1930. Harold was then twelve years old and Helen was around twenty. Me, being at that time only six, was no wonder I did not recognize them.

I had the chance to spend with them the Sunday at the Zbar's cottage at which time they had other visitors and I found it difficult to speak with them alone and to share with them some of the memories and pass on the message from my mother which I carried with me throughout the last seven years and expounded on in my mind to endlessness.

Yet it was for me a very stirring and moving moment to see again my two cousins whom I did remember from my childhood. But more than this, they were part of the family that lived in New York. The family that my mother loved so much, that never left her mind nor did she let it leave ours.

The next day my cousins left. The following Sunday the Zbar's and Mr. Berlin took us to see the farm. The decision was made to buy the farm.

The truth is that I had very little to say in it. It was the Zbar's and Mr. Berlin's say and money except the two thousand dollars that my uncle sent. But it was mostly on the grounds that my friend Bluestein claimed that he was a farmer at home and good at it.

We decided on a day to come to Kingston and arrange all the formalities at a lawyer. When the day came and we came together all there. All the ready cash was the two thousand dollars that my uncle Shloime Auerbach sent from New York. We were short five and a half thousand dollars. A very large sum in those days. Mr. Berlin offered right away to extend us a loan for this amount. I can still recall as the lawyer was making out the agreement between us and Mr. Berlin, he was writing down every word and pronouncing it loudly and clearly so a we, the two newcomers could understand. He was saying; "We, the two undersigned undertake to repay the above mentioned amount at the end of five years with the interest rate of.." Here he stopped to hear from Mr.Berlin the amount of interest he was going to charge us. Mr. Berlin answered calmly, "none." The lawyer who had his eyes glued until now to the paper jerked up his head. His face staring unbelievingly at what Mr. Berlin said. "What?" asked the lawyer. Mr. Berlin repeated this time with two words; "No interest." The lawyer held his gaze on Mr. Berlin for a few long seconds more. Then he turned to us two and said; " You are lucky men."

That night getting back to Abramsky's farm, we decided that one of us should go to our own farm to get acquainted with the work and the established order of looking after the animals. Besides we did not know how long the former owner will be willing to stay on, for he said that he will not remain much more than a week.

The next Sunday as we were getting on the bus for Kingston as every Sunday, I took with me all my belongings. That same day yet the Zbars and Mr. Berlin took me to our farm.

The former owner, a man in his middle thirties with his wife and young children tried to make me comfortable.

As it was almost the end of September there was a lot of work on the farm. The first and main thing that had to be done twice daily, morning and evening, was to milk the cows. A task done with the help of an electric milk machines which I had never seen before. Some of the cows sensing a stranger near them who approached them awkwardly, were not above kicking with their hind legs. Never the less, I had learned to operate the milk machine and got used to the cows and they to me.

In late summer and fall there are many things that have to be done besides milking cows. Even on a dairy farm like ours was.

There was four acres of corn to take in and four acres of sugar beets. Some of the beets were so large they would not fit into an ordinary pail. They had to be pulled out of the soil and taken into the barn and that is what I had been doing by myself as the former owner felt no responsibility for the farm. A week later he and his family left. The same week Bluestein came.

I had began to learn a lot of things about a farm, especially a dairy farm where there is livestock. I had learnt soon enough that one can not leave a farm for a whole day only for part of it. That there is never a moment when a farmer can say; "Now I can relax" and that no matter how long the day is, it is never long enough.

Here our day used to begin at five in the morning. At six we were already milking the cows. After milking, the milk had to be carried to the road in metal containers and deposited on a wooden stand from where it used too be collected by a truck and delivered to one of the three dairy plants that were at that time in Brockville. There, each can used

to be tested for its milk and milk fat. The farmers used to receive a cheque every two weeks.

After milking the cows, we had to drive them outside to be watered at the trough and clean the stables of the manure and straw from the previous night, replacing it with fresh straw.

The part where the horses stood had to be cleaned too. After watering, the horses and cows had to be driven to the pasture.

By that time it used to be eight in the morning. Time to wash up and eat breakfast, which never varied. It consisted of boiled potatoes from the previous night that we used to dump in a hot pan with freshly fried onions. After the potatoes got hot, we used to crack over them a half dozen eggs, mixing the whole thing for a minute or so. We then sat down to the meal washing it down with milk.

I will admit that it was a nourishing and calorie rich meal but only one of two a day. As soon as we finished we left the house not to come in until after milking the cows in the evening, which was never before eight.

The first couple of weeks, we spent the hours of the day bringing in the sugar beets from the field into the barn. I would estimate that there was approximately sixty tons of it from which the leaves and roots had to be removed first and carried into the barn in a sack on our backs.

Next came the corn. As we had no silo, we had to cut the stalks down, tie them in sheaves and bring them into the barn.

There was still a fair amount of potatoes in the ground that seemed to be a bit too much for our needs. We decided to sell some. I deliberately timed myself one day and kept on digging from after breakfast until milking time. Six in the evening. I filled up ten sacks of potatoes. When we sold them the next day, all we got was seventy five cents per hundred pound bag.

For my nine hours of digging plus the thousand pounds of potatoes, I got seven and a half dollars. Counting the labour of ploughing, fertilizing, seeding and weeding. I am sure that if I would have gone to do the same potato digging at a neighbour, he would have given me ten dollars for that day's work.. No ploughing, no seeding and no weeding.

Such was the lot of the average farmer. Yes, there were some prosperous ones. They were closer to the city where they could sell their produce and get a better price. Others had more land and were mechanized where everything was on a larger scale. They had tractors, multi disc ploughs and even combines. There was no time wasted on feeding and watering horses or on harness and unharnessing them, cleaning stables and other chores around horses.

The average farmer in those days worked hard and did no more than eke out an ordinary living. If he succeeded in saving up a few dollars, it was due to his frugality and not to his earning ability.

In general farming in those parts was entirely different than what I used to see in the part of the world where I grew up. There the farmer was self sufficient almost in every respect. Not only did he grow and raise all his food, he used to grow flax to make linen from which he made shirts, pants and under wear for the family. His sheep used to supply him enough wool to make felt for his winter outerwear even heavy felt boots.

The warmest footwear available and the sheep skin made excellent warm and durable coats. It was only the surplus that the farmer sold in order to buy the most elementary needs.

Here we were confronted with a different kind of farming. A completely specialized kind of farming. The farmer did not even keep a few hens to satisfy his need for eggs or fowl.

The small Jewish community that existed then in Brockville consisted of a dozen or so families. The word spread swiftly that a couple of Holocaust survivors are living on a farm some miles away near a place called Greenbush. The place Greenbush consisted of four houses situated on a cross road of two farm roads. The owner of one of those houses had a country store, where one could buy groceries and necessities.

One can understand that the place Greenbush itself was not easy to find. From there about a mile down the road was our farm.

On a Sunday afternoon beginning of October, a car pulled up into the farm and from it four passengers got out. Those were Mr. and Mrs. Pleet with their two children. Their daughter, Ruth, a girl of eighteen and a son, Lenny, a boy of eight. They were the first Jewish family from Brockville that came to visit us.

Little did I know that this eighteen year old girl would be, in less than two years, my wife and the mother to our future three children.

I recall another Jewish family from Brockville that came to visit us shortly after by the name of Feltcher.

A few miles from us was another Jewish family farming by the name of Zarkover. They were fortunate to have left Poland two months before the war began in 1939. In a sense they could be considered rich, having two or three parcels of land, two or three hundred acres and over thirty milking cows, but I know for a fact that they did not have one hundred dollars cash in the bank. The farms had a tendency to swallow up every penny the farmer invested in it. If he was willing to invest.

The Zarkovers had a jeep, which they used for driving as well as ploughing the field. On a scattered Sunday they used to drive over to us for a couple of hours to share pre war experiences in Poland and present day farm problems and practices.

In the same October on a dark night, there was a knock on the door and a man in his forties walked in. He introduced himself as Harry Kavanet, a Jew from Lithuania who came to Canada twenty odd years ago as a teenager. We found out that he has a wife and a son living in Brockville. He is a chicken dealer. He covers the surrounding territory buying chickens from the chicken farmers and ships them to Montreal.

As a teenager he came to this neighbourhood buying individual chickens from the farmers. As in those days, that is between the two world wars, farmers kept some chickens for their own use.

In those days he used to be a boarder with one of the farmer's around. Having come without knowing a word of English, he found it difficult to adjust, but slowly began to pick up English words, so to say "from the street," from the farmers around.

As he was telling us his story, he suddenly stopped and with a worried expression on his face, he asked: Do you speak some English? We answered, "Some." He went on to say; "Remember, if you do not understand or do not know how to answer, don't." I will tell you my experience, he said. Did you meet your neighbour to your right? Here he

pointed to the little house that stood on the next parcel of land some four-five hundred meters away, which in the dark could only be seen as a small window with a light in it. We have met the neighbour, Mr. Horton, who came to introduce himself. He lived alone in that little house looking after a few sheep. His land was worked by his son, some houses down the road. He was a tall erect man, despite his ninety six years, with eye sight that needed no binoculars.

We nodded. "Well, " continued Harry Kavanet, "I knew that if I want to live here, I have to learn English and fast. I managed to pick up enough words to buy a chicken, but I wanted more. One of the most frequent words I used to hear was "G-d damn it." Once finding myself among a group of farmers, I heard it again and asked them what it means. They were unable to explain the word "Damn it" could only point to the sky saying "G-d damn it," as the word "G-d" sounds very much like the word "Got" in Yiddish. Harry understood the word "G-d Damn it" to mean G-d.

Mr. Horton, our neighbour was then a man of around seventy, who was very nice to Harry Kavanet and whenever he met him used to say "hello" and even tried to make conversation with him.

One summery Sunday morning as Kavanet was walking on the road between the farms, he met Mr. Horton who was going in the opposite direction. In the direction of the church. Mr. Horton as customary with a broad smile says to Kavanet: Good morning Harry. Are you going to church? Kavanet, in his pitiable English wanted to tell him that he prays in his fashion and Mr. Horton in his. What he said was; "You pray to your G-d Damn it and I to my G-d Damn it." Mr. Horton turned away and stopped looking in Kavanet's direction.

Poor Kavanet could not understand the reason Mr. Horton stopped speaking to him. Many months later, when Kavanet's English had improved enough to realize what he said to Mr. Horton, he profusely apologized to him. Mr. Horton felt embarrassed, saying that: I should have understood that what you said is not what you meant.

It is ironic that a short time later I fell victim of such an incident. True, not to this embarrassing extent. Never the less, I felt uncomfortable.

Across the road of our farm there was a farm belonging to an old established Canadian family by the name of Twa. Their house was located right across ours, even closer to the road than ours. We got acquainted soon and were soon helping out one another. The only few minutes we used to stop work was to listen to the radio for some news about the fighting that was going on in Israel, when the fate of its very existence was hanging in the balance and the few months old Jewish state had to fight off not only six Arab regular armies but direct and indirect intervention from other countries that sympathized with the Arabs, especially Britain. Not content with having left their light and heavy weapons to the trans Jordanian legion while leaving Palestine, they were continually observing the movement of the Jewish forces from planes and passing it on to the Jordanian and Egyptian forces.

After many complaints and warning from the newly formed Israeli government, the fledgling Jewish air force shot down five British planes in a day. Of course the whole British world was in an uproar. It was of course, all over the whole Canadian press even the small Brockville paper, "The Brockville Recorder and Times," gave it full pages, accusing the Jews of having the audacity to shoot down five British planes.

There was no question that Blustein and I were happy with the result of that confrontation and I showed the paper with the headlines to our neighbour expressing my satisfaction. He turned to me saying, "I see you hate the British." Not knowing what the word "hate" meant, I asked him. He thought for a moment. Apparently to find a substitute for the word and came up wit the word "do not like". I innocently agreed.

A day or two later we were helping him with something in his back yard. His wife came out to see what we were doing. He turns to her and says: "You know, he hates the British." She gave me a curious look but said nothing. I made nothing of it, feeling justified in not liking the British.

As Kavanet, I too found out later the difference between the meaning of "not liking and hate", and tried to be non committal to statements or sayings I did not understand.

It was also there in that rural Ontario that I came face to face with the dislike, or to be precise, hatred that existed between Protestants and Catholics and how deep rooted it was.

Yet they were neighbour who used to come together in harvest time to help one another with harvesting the corn and filling up the silos where there was a need of ten-twelve men, or cutting up wood for winter.

How polite and superficial they were to one another at that time. Yet when alone with us, they used to entrust their innermost feeling towards one group or the another.

The two of us could not understand how those two Christian groups could hate each other so much and were wondering how much more the two of them must hate us Jews.

As Jews and with the memories of the Holocaust fresh in our minds, we made sure not to infringe in any way on our neighbours. In fact we made sure that they owed us. For example; When we were asked to help one with bringing in the corn and filling up the silo, both of us used to come, while from the other farms only one was expected and one used to come. Not only did we both come, but we never asked anyone of them to come to help us in return. The same was applicable with preparing the fire wood for the winter. While we helped the neighbours cut up the wood with a circular saw, a matter of a day's work, we spent a month pulling a saw back and forth to cut up our own wood.

The days became noticeably shorter. The weather deteriorated. We were getting up and milking the cows while it was still dark. Our summer work clothes were both worn out and cold for that time of year. Fortunately we received a notice that there was a parcel weighing eighty five pounds waiting for us in the custom house in Brockville.

My uncle Shloime (Solomon) had written to me earlier that he was sending me the boys' military clothes that they had come home with from the war. It could not have come in a better time. Consisting of all kinds of pants, shirts, jackets and coats. Made to last. Even water proof attire. We had become the envy of our neighbours, for the military work clothes were perfect for our work on the farm.

During that fall, Mr. and Mrs Zbar and Mr. Berlin came to visit us a couple of times, but with the weather and the road deteriorating, the distance that exceeded the distance to our former employer's farm by twice as much, proved too much for them and they stopped coming.

Not being able to see them, we never the less stayed in touch with them by mail. Nor did I neglect to be in constant touch with my uncle Shloime (Solomon) and his family.

Both of us were also in touch with our friend and third man in our room in Italy, Leibel Bliskowsky, who remained in Italy waiting for a visa to the United States.

In the late fall, getting tired of waiting, he wrote asking if we could get some farmer to sponsor him to come to Canada. We got one of our neighbour's to sponsor him. We also got in touch with a couple of Bliskowsky's town's people who lived in Montreal to guarantee his passage expenses.

After having it all arranged he, Bliskowsky, backed out and left Italy for Israel.

During the short days of the late fall, we used to spend the daylight hours repairing the fences around the farm. We had five kilometres of fence and all in bad shape. They were put up a hundred years or so before we came. Once they started deteriorating, they could keep a man busy all year round. The cows apparently believe in the saying ; "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence." They tried to get to the other side oblivious of the fact that it belonged to another owner.

We too were aware of the saying; "Good fences makes for good neighbours" tried to make sure our cows stayed on our land. Still no matter how hard we tried, it did happen that our cows broke out or somebody else's broke in our pasture. But all in all, it did not happen more than a couple of times.

When the snow came there was no use in keeping the livestock outdoors. To make up for the green grass, we had to spend hours chopping up corn stalks into small pieces as well as sugar beets feeding them to the cows morning and night while they were being milked. With this mixture, they used to get a bowl full of ground up oats.

With the winter, they were constantly kept indoors except for an hour morning and night after milking. In order to be watered and for us to clean the stable and change the straw under them.

Encouraged by the Zbars and Mr. Berlin we made plans. The barn was old and so was the stable. We made plans to build new ones. If not new ones, at least to rebuild them. For that we needed material. We had thirty five acres of woods. Many trees up to three quarter of a meter across. The big ones were elm. We knew nothing of the characteristics of elm trees. All we could see was their huge trunks that promised all kinds and sizes of plank. So we decided to use those trees.

I have never seen a tree being cut down. Maybe a small one that a man could push it or direct it to fall. I had no idea what it meant to cut down a tree seventy or eighty centimetres thick.

I will never forget our first day in the woods and the cutting down of our first tree.

It was a cold wintry day. After milking the cows and finishing up all the other daily chores, we had a heavy breakfast. We hitched up our two one ton horses to the sleigh and tied on another sleigh to this one. We set out across the snow covered field to the other end of the farm to the woods.

The drive across the open field was not an easy one. The snow was much deeper than we thought. At times, the horses used to fall into drifts up to their belly and the wind was very high. However, as soon as we entered the forest, it was like coming into a building. Even the few leaves left on some bushes from the past summer did not move. All one could hear was the rustle of the tree tops or the flapping of wings from scattered flying birds.

We left our two horses hitched up between some large trees. Picking out one of the largest trees, we began to cut it down using an ordinary saw.

We soon found out that it is no easy task to saw a three quarter of a meter thick elm tree.

Finally the tree began to fall breaking off branches of surrounding trees as well as its own in the process. To late did we realize our mistake of not tying down the horses to a tree. The sound of breaking branches and thud of the fallen tree was enough to scare a first time bystander, let alone a horse. So, sure enough, the horses took off with the two sleighs. One behind the other through the branches and trees as fast as they could. Fortunately the straps of the bridle (reins) got snagged on some branches and the horses stopped a couple of hundred meters away. Never the less, during this short run they succeeded to break both sleighs and it took us a few days to repair them.

We had learned to leave the horses a fair distance from a falling tree and tie them to a tree properly.

After a tree was cut down, the trunk had to be cut up in twelve feet long pieces. This in itself was not easy either. A green elm trunk is not friendly to a saw and tries to jam it at any occasion. We had to resort to using wedges. Even getting a twelve foot long and two and a half foot thick log on the sleigh was not easy either. We eventually learned to use the horses to do the job. Those logs had to be brought out from the woods to near the buildings. A distance of a kilometre and a half.

Half way between the woods and the house ran a creek coming from one neighbour to the right, crossing our farm and going to the neighbour to the left. It was on average three meters wide but it was never more than ten centimetres deep. The problem was that it had steep banks over half a meter high. A little wooden bridge spanned over it that must have been built by the very first owner. We were afraid that the bridge would not support the weight of the horses and logs, so we used to go across the frozen creek which was covered with snow, not only up to the high bank but levelled to the depth of the snow all around. Sometimes, we used to cross it without a hitch, but at times the snow under the weight of the log used to collapse and the leading sled used to get stuck under the high bank leaving the log and both sleighs between the two banks of the creek.

It used to take us half a day to get out of such a situation.

We began planning to build a new bridge across the creek, but it could not be done in the middle of the winter. So we decided to postspone it until the spring.

One day after another accident with a log over the creek, my partner Blustein got so mad that in frustration he began to tear apart the old bridge. I spoke to him calmly: Wait until we have built the new one before you destroy the old one. But it was of no use. He went a head in his fit of madness.

Of course, we never got around to building a new one.

Not only the logs but also the branches were taken out. We spent many days cutting it up for fire wood. The heavy branches cut to a foot in length made excellent fire wood for the furnace that was in the basement and used to heat the house. The thinner branches after sawing it into short pieces, were used in the kitchen stove for cooking and heating water. Some of the branches were so thick that we had to split them.

It was then that we realized how difficult it was to deal with elm.

Having made sure that we had enough logs from which to make enough planks for a new barn and stable, we started taking them by horse and sled to a saw mill some fifteen kilometres away. There, after having cut the logs into
planks about night fall, we used to return home with the planks about night fall, where the chores of milking the cows and cleaning out the stable awaited us.

Already in the late fall, we became aware of the sharp drop in milk produced by the cows, and as the winter progressed, so did continue the drop in the quantity of the milk produced.

We realized that the cows are drying up. The smallest cheque we received for a months production of milk was in February in the amount of seven dollars, while the largest was in the amount of three hundred dollars for the month of September and close to it in October. It improved in March when the cows began calving and resumed their milk production.

The whole process of calving was to me a phenomenon and a new experience. Early March was still cold outside and not much warmer in the stable and I was concerned about the new born calves. I should not have been. Nature is also a protector.

The calves never had a chance to taste their mother's milk. They were immediately trained to drink from a pail and were kept away from their mothers. We partitioned off a part of the stable where we kept the calves feeding them milk three times a day. As they began to drink by themselves, we started to mix some ground oats into the milk.

Every few days a cow used to calve. The good part was that the cows began to give more milk so we could look forward to a bigger cheque. On the other end, the calves needed attention, which took up time, and they also used to consume a fair amount of their mother's milk.

Already a couple weeks before Pessach, Mr. and Mrs. Pleet extended an invitation to me to come to them for the two nights "Sedorim" of Pessach, which I happily accepted. They also extended the invitation to my partner Blustein. As the two of us could not leave the farm at once, the decision was made that I should go, as Blustein understood that they wanted me, because of their daughter, Ruth was coming home for the holidays from Montreal where she worked. But Blustein agreed to let me go providing that I would let him go to Montreal. I agreed and he left a couple of days later.

The work of milking the cows, feeding the calves, (at that time we had three already), and cleaning the stables fell on me. To my dismay, when I came in the next morning to milk the cows, I found another new born calf on the floor. As if in spite, during my partner's absence of six days, three new calves were born.

When he came back, his entire way of thinking had changed. I found out that his purpose for going to Montreal was to see his chances of finding a wife. It turned out that he met a woman who would consider marriage, but would not go on a farm. She suggested he should sell the farm, move to Montreal and then talk about marriage.

When Pessach arrived a few days later, I hitchhiked a ride to Brockville arriving just before sundown. Everything in their house was nice and clean for Pessach. The house was filled with the aroma of good food for the Seder. When suddenly Mr. Pleet walked in carrying a huge carp, and proudly displaying it to Mrs. Pleet saying : Look what I just got!! Mrs. Pleet looked at him in disbelieve saying: What did you bring me this for? In an hour or so it will be Pessach. Mr. Pleet answered: An acquaintance of mine just gave

it to me for free. How could I say no to such a fish? He answered lifting up proudly the ten kilogram carp even higher. Mrs. Pleet looked at the two of them disprovingly. Something compelled me to intervene and I said: I will clean it! That put an end to further discussions for which everyone was grateful. I asked for a knife and carried the fish to the shed in the back yard.

I guess the skill I acquired to clean fish on Abramsky's farm came in handy, for in no time the fish was ready to be cooked. I believe we tasted it the very same evening at the Seder, which was conducted in a very traditional way by Mr. Pleet. It was reminiscent of the Seders we used to conduct an eternity ago in Shershev.

For me it was the first Seder in eight years of which I was very aware. I did not let myself sink in gloom and acted as festive as I could. I went with Mr. Pleet to the synagogue, heard some new melodies at the Seder and sang some of my own that I remembered. I spent the afternoon walking around Brockville with Ruth. The second Seder was just as festive as the first but I felt more at ease. The next morning I went back to the farm. I hated to take off my only suit that I brought from Italy and get into my farm work clothes.

My partner, unlike prior to his trip to Montreal, stopped making plans for the farm. He did not say much aloud but I noticed that at times he was preoccupied with his thoughts. From time to time he used to bring up the subject of that woman in Montreal or muse aloud about his future on the farm. To my lack of sympathy or at times indifference, he used to say: Sure you are smart. You are twenty five years old and flirting with a nineteen year old girl. What have I got to look forward to on this farm?

The snow melted. Green grass began to sprout and the soil began to dry. The spring had arrived. It was time to get to work. We had a three disc plough, which needed extensive repairs that we could not afford. So we bought an ordinary plough and began to plough our fifty five acres of land. Our neighbours looked at us in disbelieve. For no farmer who had to plough as much land would attempt to do it with a single bladed plough.

Our day started at five in the morning. One would look after all chores like milking the cows, cleaning the stables, feeding the calves, watering and driving the cows to the pasture. This in itself used to take anywhere from four to five hours for one man, while the other one used to start ploughing the field during day light.

I never held a plough in my hands but I soon got the knack of it and became as good as any farmer, ploughing the furrow as straight as any of them.

Farm work, especially not mechanized is hard work and to follow a team of horses twelve hours a day holding on to the handles of a plough tightly, and with agility is no easy task, for the top soil was fairly shallow and beneath it in many places was a stony bottom. If that stony bottom got hooked, it would come up in shell or shift like pieces of ten centimetres thick and a meter or more in diameter, lifting with it all the top soil, tearing the plough out of the hands and if not stopped in time, would tip over falling on the hind legs of the horses causing injury or at least stampede the horses.

My partner Blustein, being older and above all being a heavy man, could not keep on ploughing for hours, so it became my task to plough from dawn to dusk, while he did the other chores.

Neighbours used to come by to admire my resilience and how I can keep ploughing over two acres a day, day after day.

Before the ploughing the mountain of manure that accumulated behind the stable over the winter had to be spread all over the fields and we did it by hand not having a manure spreader. However, we did have a grain planter, which came in handy. We also planted some corn, sugar beets and potatoes.

Besides all this, we also planted some vegetables in the space allotted for a garden. My partner insisted on digging deep narrow ditches between the beds despite the advice of the neighbours and my protest, claiming that this is how he used to do it "at home." It did not help arguing with him or explaining that the ground in our parts of Poland was low and swampy and that we used to have a lot of rain fall. He went a head and dug those ditches. As a result we had a poor crop despite the fact that we used to water the garden when time permitted.

Surprisingly enough we, or shall I say I, did manage to plough the fifty five acres of land in time for sowing. Having finished the spring chores we began to get ready for hay making.

In between, my two cousins, my uncle Shloime's (Solomon) two daughters, Helen and Rose came to visit us from New York.

It was the second time I saw my cousin Helen. The first time was when she came with her brother, Harold, the previous year to visit me on Abramsky's farm. They stayed with us some ten days. I took off time after milking the cows to talk with them and reminisce about Shershev that they remembered better than I and of course about our families that we had there but are no more. Above all, about my immediate family. My mother that was their aunt, their father's sister whom they remembered clearly.

There was no end to the stories. We used to sit up till late at night, for me almost to getting up time.

They stayed for ten days. It was lonely when they left. Shortly afterwards we had visitors from Toronto. My two friends Zygmund Suchter and Max Moneta came for a visit with their wives Zena and Irka. They too were my friends, all from the refugee camps in Italy.

With them I shared a mutual experiences from those three years in Italy, when we were all single. After a few days they too left, just in time for hay making.

First the hay had to be cut by a hay cutter pulled by a team of horses. The hay remained on the ground to dry for several days while it was being turned over a couple of times to make sure it was dry all over. Then it was raked in long rows with the help of a large rake, again drawn by a horse. Finally it was loaded on a wide large wagon with the help of a hay loader which is attached to the wagon. As the horses pulled the wagon which in turn pulled the hay loader whose wheels they propelled. A mechanism which picks up the hay lifting it high above the wagon where it dropped down into the wagon.

For loading the hay there was a need for two men. One to drive the horses or tractor and the second on the wagon, spreading the coming down hay from the loader, over the whole wagon.

The easy job was to lead the horses but the spreading of the constantly piling up hay, was another matter. One had to be constantly on the move trying to pile in as much hay as possible in every corner of the wagon whose platform was five meters long and two

meters wide. Staying waist deep in hay, being constantly assaulted by a heavy stream of hay, was hard work.

The hay maker season takes about two weeks. We barely finished bringing in the hay into the barn when the oat harvesting time was upon us. We had a binder, drawn by the horses. The binder cuts the grain and binds it into sheaves.

It took us some three weeks to take in the grain. The next would be the corn, which was not ripe yet.

As the barn badly needed repairs and we had prepared plenty of lumber over the winter, we got ready to utilize the time fixing the barn.

To our surprise we discovered that the elm planks which were so straight when we piled them up to dry, had twisted like cork screws wherever they were not weighed down. More or less half of them had to be discarded, for even if an end a foot long board was not weighed down, it had twisted and unfit for our purpose.

Never the less there was lots of straight timber left and we began to hammer it over the weakened side of the barn. To our dismay, the nails would not penetrate the wood. Half a dozen nails were bent before we could successfully hammer a nail into that wood. Some of our neighbours suggested to dip the tip of the nail in grease before hamming it in. It helped a bit. In stead of bending six or eight nails, we used to bend three or four, but to make up for this accomplishment, the board used to split as soon as the nail was half way through it. If we used, by chance, to succeed in hammering in one nail into the board, the net nail used to do it, splitting the board. Thus, having to remove it.

After many different tries and disappointments, we came to the conclusion that elm wood is not good as building material. Of course, would we have had drills to drill holes in the wood, it would have been another story. But neither we nor our neighbours had any. If.....

With August came the time to take in the oats. Like in winter when a dozen or so neighbours used to come together to help each other with cutting up the wood, so in summer we helped each other with threshing the oats and cutting up and filling up the silo. But her again the two of us helped them, but we did not ask them to help in return.

Instead, we worked for almost a month with the binder, which cut and tied the grain into sheaves and then took it into the barn.

It is a lot of work to clear fifty five acres of oats from the field into a barn. Only a farmer from fifty years ago would appreciate it.

For us there was no let up, for after the taking the oats in, the corn then had to be taken in. Here as in the previous fall we had to chop up the corn stalk. Not like all the neighbours who had silos in which the chopped up corn used to be blown in by machine.

Already in early summer I noticed that the enthusiasm with which my partner came to the farm was diminishing and it became even more apparent with time, even though he tried to hide it in the presence of others.

More and more he began to talk about getting rid of the farm, that the farm holds no future for him, that no woman, certainly a Jewish woman would leave the city for a farm. With time, his whining had increased to a degree that he began speaking openly about leaving the farm.

At that time I could see only one obvious reason. Namely; the fact that he came to the conclusion that one cannot save any money on a farm. The best one can hope for was to

eke out a living. Seeing that he had no investment in the farm, as his uncle never sent the two thousand dollars he promised, he, Blustein had nothing to lose by abandoning it.

At the age of twenty six, I could not and did not understand a man twenty years my senior, who had lost a wife and two children almost ten years earlier, his loneliness and despair as he watched his middle age years slipping away. The fact that Ruth, Mr. and Mrs. Pleet's nineteen year old daughter and my present wife of all those years, had given up her job in Montreal to come home, deliberately or not, so she can come out to the farm to see me at least once a week or more, only emphasized and called to attention his loneliness.

During the week, Ruth used to call me on the telephone a couple of times. I used to reciprocate but not for each call. I simply could not afford it. Speaking about the phone, we used to have a party line. This meant that there were more than one customer on a line and anyone on the line could listen in on the other person's conversation.

My conversation with Ruth used to be conducted in English. The reason being that I wanted to improve my English. The only person around was Blustein with whom I conversed in Yiddish.

As with all young people, we flirted a bit on the phone until I heard once somebody trying to stifle a giggle. It dawned on me that at least one person on the line was listening to our conversation. How long it had been going on and how many hade been listening in, I will never know, for there were twenty telephones on our line.

From that time on, Ruth and I conversed in Yiddish. Some of our neighbours were deprived of a bit of entertainment.

All that time I kept up a correspondence with my close friend Bliskowsky whom I left in Italy, and with my relatives in Israel. But of course the closest contract was with my uncle Shloime (Solomon) in New York and his children.

In early fall after long deliberation with my uncle and his children, especially his oldest son Jack, who worked at that time for the U.S. Dept of Justice, I decided to give in to their desire to come to New York on a visit. I was not yet a Canadian citizen but I had heard of some new Canadians who after proving to the U.S. authorities at the border that they had some investment in Canada, had been let in on a visit.

My cousin Jack sent me his phone number at the office, which was the Dept. of Justice and told me to ask the U.S. border inspector to call him and he would guarantee my return to Canada.

One of the first Jews I met in Brockville, Mr. Felsher, had a second hand furniture store in Brockville at the corner of King and Perth Streets, offered to go with me across the border to the other side of the St. Lawrence river to the town of Morristown.

The border crossing meant to get to the shore of the St. Lawrence River in Brockville where a small ferry was docked that could take on a couple of cars and a couple dozen passengers. Near the ferry stood a small building with a Canadian flag on a tall post in front of it. That small building housed the Canadian emigration office with one officer at the desk.

We got into the ferry which took us across the mighty St. Lawrence and docked on the opposite shore two-three kilometres away, already the American side. Here too, stood the same size building with a flag post and on it the American flag.

I got off the ferry with the handful of other passengers and Mr. Felsher beside me. I stood on the American soil. The land of which every Eastern and Central European Jew dreamt of. The land of freedom and plenty and the land of which everyone I knew yearned for.

The welcoming committee consisted of one immigration inspector who asked every passenger where he was born. After hearing the answer, he waved them on. I knowing that I will have to answer many questions, waited to be the last.

As soon as I told him that I was born in Poland and had no visa, he ordered me into the office. I tried to tell him that I had two uncles in the United States and some dozen cousins. I showed him the papers that I owned a farm near Brockville. I also gave him my cousin Jack's telephone number and asked him to call and confirm my story and identity. I remember him saying: You can be president Truman's cousin. I will still not let you in without a visa.

As I and Mr. Felsher turned to get on the ferry for Brockville, he said: Wait. I will give you a letter to the Canadian inspector so he will let you back into Canada. Saying this, he wrote out a letter and gave it to me.

Getting off at the Canadian side, I handed it to the Canadian inspector who after reading it, tore it up saying: You do not need it. You have a Canadian entry visa. Any Canadian inspector must let you in.

I was very disappointed that I could not get to the states. For some reason I was sure that I would be permitted to enter. More than my disappointment was that of my family's in New York.

The weather began to change. There were days when there was no let up due to the downpour and it was impossible to do any work outdoors. It was my biggest enjoyment to put on the rubber boots and the waterproof two-piece suit that my uncle Shloime sent me from New York and walk across the length of the farm to the very end including the woods. The entire two kilometres and back. No matter how hard the rain used to fall, not a drop of water penetrated nor did it fall on my face that was protected by the side rimmed hood.

It used to take me back in time to my youth. When I was a boy sitting in my friend's, Moishe Gelman's living room on a rainy day at an open window and watching the rain coming down on their flower garden which was without a doubt, the nicest in Shershev.

What beautiful memories that walk used to bring back and trigger yearnings to those days and longing for those people. Family and friends so dear to me whose lives had been cut so cruelly and mercilessly. Taken away from this world and from me. Forever.

I cannot explain why, but in that empty expanse of the fields around me, for who would walk in that weather with rain coming down in sheets, in the storm alone by myself, I felt an unusual nearness to them. It brought on a feeling of sadness and warmth as if they were near or with me at that moment and with whom in my mind I could communicate with.

That summer the Zbars and Mr. Berlin came out to us on the farm several times. I am sure that they would have come more often, were it not for the fact that my partner began yet in the middle of summer, to allude to the fact that no Jewish girl would come to live on the farm with him. I am sure that they understood, although indulgently and without comment, that he was not happy there.

Mine and Ruth's feelings towards each other changed during the year from acquaintance to friendship, sensitivity, emotion and sentiment, it was inevitable that the subject of marriage would come up. I recall a remark that Ruth made half seriously during one of our more earnest conversations. She said: "A farmer will never get rich unless he strides oil on his land. You will never strike oil on this farm."

Somehow, without much discussion or arguments, we, that is, my partner and I came to the decision to sell the farm. I was not happy for I realized that we stand to loose money as we overpaid to begin with and the looser would be me. We could not let Mr. Berlin loose some of the money he lent us. As the other money in the farm was from my uncle Shloime (Solomon), it was only proper the I should take the loss. That is, the money from my uncle.

The second reason was of a different sort. I had never forgotten the time when we, the males that were driven from Shershev to Antopol, after the two days march during which some hundred of us were killed by the Germans, we were reunited with the rest of our families in Antopol and immediately were expelled and driven eastward. An entire community of two thousand souls, men, women and children. As we were driven eastwards devoid of everything. Destitute, deprived of any possession, not even a crust of bread. We could see in the distance the individual farms. See the farmers how they went about their chores in peace and tranquility while we were being driven to places or fates unknown. How we were envious of those farmers who were leading such a peaceful life.

That memory and particularly that quest for tranquility materialized for me in a sense on that farm which I loathed to leave once there.

There was no though of me remaining alone on the farm. Firstly, I would not be able to do it by myself. Secondly, I was not excited about the idea of a farm to begin with. It was only on my partner Blustein's expertise and authority that the farm was bought in the first place by the Zbars and Mr. Berlin. It was by the same authority that the decision to sell was made.

It the middle of October 1949, Mr. and Mrs. Pleet made a dinner in their home for the few Jewish families in Brockville at which time Ruth and I announced our engagement.

By the end of October having taken in all the harvest, the decision was made to have a sale of the farm and everything on it on the 9th of November. An announcement was put in the local newspaper "The Brockville Recorder and Times" about the auction sale.

The total sum that the sale brought in including the farm was fifty five hundred dollars, just enough to cover Mr. Berlin's loan. The experience with the farm had cost us two thousand dollars exactly the amount my uncle Shloime (Solomon) sent for my contribution.

A day or two later when we all met at the lawyer in Kingston to annul our partnership and to be released from our financial debt to Mr. Berlin who got his fifty five hundred dollars we owned him, I asked my former partner why I should be loosing two thousand dollars in our endeavour to which he was more than an even partner and on whose credentials the partnership was built. Seeing his hesitation, the Zbars and Mr. Berlin agreed with my contention that he should be a partner to the loss. As he had no money, he was going to give me an "I.O.U." for a thousand dollars. Just before signing the note,

he took out a watch from his pocket and handing it to me, he said; It is worth a hundred dollars and for the balance of the nine hundred dollars, I will give your an I.O.U.

Not being in the position to argue or contend the value, I accepted the watch and the I.O.U. for the nine hundred dollars.

I left for Montreal which was at that time not only the largest city in Canada, but also the centre for Canadian Jewry. I rented a room with an elderly childless Jewish couple by the name of Freedman at 5990 Park Avenue for twenty dollars a month.

A few days later, I found a job as a carpenter in a desk factory by the name of "Standard Desk." There I worked ten hours a day, five days a week for the take home pay of twenty seven dollars a week. From this I had to put away five dollars a week for rent and the rest was mine to spend. Too much to spend I could not, yet I liked to take out Ruth on Saturday nights to a night club which was an expense between twelve and fifteen dollars, which left me with seven to ten dollars for food and transportation to and from work.

On the way home from work, I used to stop at a corner store to buy a loaf of sliced rye bread for nineteen cents, three cans of sardines for twenty nine cents and a quarter of a pound of butter. Arriving home I used to butter all the slices of bread and make sardine sandwiches using up all the three cans. A third of those sandwiches used to make up my supper. A third for the following day's breakfast and a third for lunch. At nigh I used to start all over again.

The only cooked meals I used to have was Friday evening. After coming from work on Friday and after a shave and shower, I used to go out to a nearby restaurant located around the corner on Bernard Street. There I used to order a hamburger served with mashed potatoes and green peas on the side and wash it down with a cup of tea. The bill used to come to ninety cents. At such an occasion I used to feel generous and after getting the cheque, I used to give the waiter a dollar and not wait for the ten cent change.

When I used to get tire eating bread and sardines three times a day, seven days a week, I used to treat myself to a lemon for a nickel and squeeze its juice over the sardines.

Friday nights we used to see a movie for free. Ruth worked for "Universal Studios." Friday nights, the Quebec censor board used to review the movies before approving them for publication. The employees of the company were permitted to attend and bring a guest. So we used to see first run movies before anyone else. Uncensored too.

During the winter of 1949 and 1950, my cousin Harold was going to get married. I certainly wanted to attend and his entire family wanted to see me there. My uncle Shloime, my aunt Esther and their children.

This time I knew to go first to the American consulate and ask for a one time entry visa. To my surprise I received one good for a whole year.

As Ruth too had an aunt and uncle in New York, she decided to come along. We took the over night train from Montreal to New York. At the border, the train stopped and some immigration inspectors got on to check the passengers papers.

Here again, I became apprehensive wondering if I will be permitted to enter or will I be taken of the train in the middle of the night and in the middle of nowhere. I did not even have enough money for a ticket back to Montreal. This time, however, with a visa to the states, all went well and in the morning we arrived in New York.

As we were going out of the station, I heard a voice from a side saying, "Moishe?" Instinctively without thinking that there might be other Moishes in New York, I turned my head in the direction of the voice. There, some five meters away, stood three men. The youngest in his twenties, the oldest the mid forties, and the third somewhere in between. By my immediate reaction they knew they got the right man. Those were my uncle's three sons. Yankel (Jack), Avreml (Abe) and Eli, who came to pick us up from the station.

After taking Ruth to her aunt and uncle, I was driven to my uncle's on 2133 Daily Avenue. The very same address my mother gave me that unforgettable morning on the 30th of January 1943 when I parted with her before she and all other members of my family were taken to Auschwitz never to be seen again.

There in their apartment was waiting my aunt Esther, their two daughters, Chvolke (Helen) and Rose, their son Lipah (Leo) and their son, the bridegroom Alchonon (Chone) Harold.

After all the hugs and kisses, I asked for my uncle and was told that he was still in the nearby synagogue to which I asked to be taken. Upon seeing me and our embrace, I noticed that my uncle was wavering on his feet. He had to sit down. I took it to be because of his age but I noticed that my cousin, his son, seemed to be getting concerned. To my question if it happens often, my cousin answered that it was the first time he saw him that way.

After a few minutes my uncle recovered. It turned out that it was the excitement due to his seeing me.

My cousin's wedding took place Saturday night. It was a beautiful affair. To me, seeing only a couple weddings in Shershev and a couple more in the displaced persons camps in Italy, such a wedding was beyond my imagination. Even now after almost half a century later and after having seen many more weddings since then, I can still say that it was a lavish affair (for the time.)

There I had the opportunity to meet the rest of my mother's family that were fortunate to have left Europe before the rise of Nazi Germany. In fact, even before the first world war.

Beside my uncle Shloime (Solomon) and aunt Esther's children at the wedding, I met my uncle's younger brother Pesah (Phillip) with his wife Esther, their children and grandchildren. As well as my third uncle's son, Irving and his wife, Ruth and their children. Unfortunately, my uncle Lipah, my mother's third brother died a young man, a few years after coming to the states before the first world war. He left behind a wife and a small son. It was this little boy that stood before me as a grow man with his wife Ruth and their two teenage children.

It was this cousin, Irving that paid for my passage from Italy to Canada.

It is difficult after so many years to describe my feelings at that moment. To have discovered the entire family from my mother's side well and alive. Sure I knew of them, but to see them in person, to be hugged ad kissed by them, to see their tears running down their cheeks and feel their affection is beyond my ability, especially after so many years.

There at that wedding I had the opportunity to introduce them to Ruth and if I may say so, to get their approval.

On my way back felt invigorated even exhilarated having found such a family for real. Not just in my mind or through a letter but in reality as living, breathing, feeling, loving and affectionate members of my family.

Montreal is known for its cold weather, and the winter of 1949-50 was no exception. Not being able to afford to take out Ruth anywhere except for the Saturday nights, I used to walk over to Ruth, as she was living with a family called Pinsky on Outremont, within walking distance from me. It had to be a cold evening to keep me from going over there, at least -25c.

In those cold evenings, I used to stay in talking to the elderly people I stayed with. Their name was Freedman. He used to eke out a living by selling newspapers at the corner of St. Catherine and St. Lawrence. I felt sorry for them. As they had no children and no social help in those days. He, in his mid sixties was out of the house before I used to get up and I used to get up at five to be at work at seven. He had to be at the corner of the above mentioned streets to catch the early risers on their way to work. By then he had to have his newspapers unpacked and ready to sell to the passer bys and drivers. He used to return home at about half past five in the evenings.

I could never understand how this old man could withstand the bitter wintry Montreal cold for twelve hours a day. Yet he did. True, his wife used to come sometimes to give him a hand. But he never left that stand to her alone. I have heard later that he spent the rest of his days at that corner from where he was taken to a hospital where after a short stay, he passed away.

Once in a while I used to hear from my former partner Blustein who found a job with a clothing manufacturing company as a stock room man. I did see him during that winter a couple of times. At that time he was still looking for a wife.

The winter was coming to an end. And with the approach of spring, the holiday of Pessach (Passover). I was invited for Pessach to Ruth's parents in Brockville.

Ruth left for home a few days before I came. When I arrived in Brockville, Ruth and her parents were waiting for me at the rail way station. Even her little brother Lenny was there.

I spent a very pleasant eight days there. Mrs. Pleet, Ruth's mother was a very good cook and prepared a beautiful variety of food. For me a very welcome change from my daily diet of sardine sandwiches. During my stay there, we decided on a date for our wedding which was June 14th.

A day after the holiday I returned to Montreal and back to work.

A couple days before the set date, I returned to Brockville. Ruth preceded me by a few days and we began to ready ourselves for the wedding which would take place at "The Murray Street Shull" in Ottawa.

All the arrangement, whatever they were, were made by Mr. & Mrs. Pleet as well as all the expenses in conjunction with the wedding were paid by them, as I had no money of my own. (Poor Poor Daddy!!)

A day before the wedding, my two uncles Shloime (Solomon) and Pesah (Phillip) Auerbach arrived from New York. In the early morning of the wedding day, Mr. Pleet, his ten year old son, Lenny, my two uncles and I got into the car and drove to Ottawa. Ruth and her mother left a day earlier.

The other guests from my side so to say were Mr. & Mrs. Zbar and Mr. Berlin. All other guest were from Ruth's side of the family.

The wedding and reception took place in the afternoon.

Ruth's parents accompanied her to the canopy. For me, my uncle Shloime and Mrs. Zbar took me. After a buffet luncheon and dancing, everybody went home. My uncles drove with my in-laws (Ruth's parents) to Brockville from where they took the train to New York.

Ruth and I remained in Ottawa for a couple more days and then returned to Brockville. From there we left for Old Orchard Beach on our honeymoon. Old Orchard Beach was then the place for honeymooners.

I like to mention that this time the border inspector gave me a hard time. Despite the fact that my year long visa was still valid. I do not know if he was this ignorant or pretended to be by asking such questions like why I did not serve in the German army. To my answer that I am a Jew, he replied: So?

After a good half hour of such bright questions during which he accused Ruth of traveling under a false name, seeing that she is my wife and all she had for identification was her birth certificate claiming her as Ruth Pleet. The answer that we just got married and that there was no time for changing names did not satisfy him.

Finally he must have gotten tired and let us go.

Old Orchard had a beautiful sandy beach that stretched for miles. Our hotel was right on the beach. Between the hotel and the Atlantic, there was nothing but a stretch of thirty to forty meters of fine sand in either direction endlessly.

After our honeymoon, we returned to Brockville where we spent a couple of months. I supposedly helped my father in law in the dry good's store which he managed to run with his wife nicely without me. However, he used to do some credit business with some customers who at times were not prompt with their payments and had to be reminded. At times it was necessary to make a home call to collect, which I helped out with.

Brockville had a close knitted Jewish community at that time of a bout a dozen families. One of them by the name of Binder whose head of the family was my father-in-law's first cousin and they had four children. Two of them about Ruth's age. There was another family with three children of the same age yet there was no active Jewish life for young people and they were all striving to go to the big city Montreal.

Ruth and I decided to do the same and with the approach of fall we went there. Not being able to afford rent for an apartment, we rented a room from a family by the name of Gurman on Waverly Street. Ruth got back her job with "Universal Pictures" and I started looking for a job.

With the help of a landsman (townsman) by the name of Sam (Shepsl) Zlotnik, who came to Canada in the twenties, I was directed to a clothing factory by the name of "Quality Pad." They were in need of a cutter. A trade in which I did not have the slightest idea.

I knocked on the office door. Upon entering I was met by the owner, Mr. Levitt, a man in the late forties. He was well dressed, well groomed and well spoken and very presentable.

To my question if he needed help, his reply was a straight forward "Yes", adding with a question if I can cut cloth. I answered "No" but I am willing to learn. But I said: I have

a condition. He looked at me inquisitively. What is that? He asked. I am a married man, I said and need at least thirty five dollars a week to get by. I know it is a lot of money for a beginner, but I am willing to work hard. He thought for a moment and said; All right. We will give it a try. Be in tomorrow at eight.

I found out a couple of weeks later that the only reason he was willing to pay me twice the going wages for a beginner, was the fact that I was married. As single young men who after working at this trade for a while used to leave him and go somewhere else as tradesmen. He knew that a married man who is getting a reasonable pay would not look for greener pastures. Besides, if he would be dissatisfied with me, he could always let me go.

It was a small factory specializing in making paddings and linings for men's suits and coats. There was the foreman, George, his two brothers in-law. One a young man in his mid twenties who was the head cutter and his younger brother, his assistant. There was a presser and some two dozen women seamstresses.

The head cutter was not very happy with me being brought in, for his younger brother who was working there for a couple of years was not permitted by the owner to be trained as a cutter. Instead he was told to train me.

After a few weeks, he got used to the idea. His brother-in-law the foreman, was getting along with me from the beginning and eventually everything fell into place. The most important thing was that the boss was satisfied with me. In fact the foreman told me that the owner told him in a moment of fidelity that the best decision he ever made regarding an employee was to take me in.

I am not trying to be facetious if I say; The boss was darn right. Six months after I started to work there I was doing as much work as the head cutter who was getting twice my pay.

Our work consisted of piling up fifty layers of cloth nicely and evenly one on top of an other. The length of a table was ten meters, the top layer was all marked up to serve as a pattern and cut the whole fifty layers with special cutters at the same time by following the top pattern.

It was a responsible job for if you made a mistake you ruin fifty pieces at once. The work itself carried with it a measure of danger, for the electric cutters were so sharp and fast that one could cut his finger or fingers off before even realizing it.

Yet I did my work skilfully and neatly without ever hearing a complaint or remark.

Ruth's work gave us the opportunity to see a movie for free each week. We stopped going out to night clubs every Saturday. Instead we used to go to see a movie and life entertainment at the same theatre by popular singers and comedians of that time.

We assumed a normal life style if it can be called so in our financial position. I saw an opportunity to improve my education and given time become an engineer, my childhood dream. I started to attend Sir George Williams College three nights a week. I used to go straight from work to school and get home at eleven at night. My entire day Sunday was taken up with doing home work.

This is how the winter 1950-51 passed. For Pesach holidays, we went to Ruth's parents in Brockville. For the summer months I gave up school and that gave us a chance to go out a little more. There were amusement parks, boat rides on the St. Lawrence River with music and dancing. Otherwise the summer of fifty one passed uneventful.

In the fall my father-in-law bought a building in Montreal on Linton Avenue. It was between Lagerie and Lavua. At that time some of the buildings on that section of the street were not even finished so the street was in a mess. The building consisted of twenty apartments. It had a low government mortgage and he bought it with a small down payment.

As Ruth's parents were still living in Brockville, somebody had to look after it. Here was also an opportunity for us to get an apartment which was difficult to get in Montreal at that time. So we moved to Linton Avenue from one room to a two bedroom apartment with our own kitchen and a balcony in the back. Of course the apartment was absolutely empty. Ruth started to look for furniture.

Fortunately we still had the money we received at our wedding from family and friends, especially the generous gifts from my family in New York. Ruth found a bedroom set she like for which we paid some twenty five hundred dollars and which emptied almost all our savings. We had enough to buy a fridge, a stove, a washing machine and a kitchen table with four chairs. We had no more money left. Yet we needed a chesterfield set in the empty living room. For this we went to Eaton's and bought it on credit, the only thing we ever bough on credit.

It was a wonderful change from living in our one room and the sharing of other facilities. The unaccustomed privacy, your own kitchen with everything in it, your own stove, fridge, washing machine, (no dryer), electric kettle, iron and ironing board, toilet facilities and the availability of a shower at any time. All those things that most of us take so much for granted. How easily we get used to all this.

At about the same time, I went back to Sir George Williams for another semester. It was not any easier than the previous year. My day used to start at six in the morning and on the school days, I used to come back at eleven at night and sometimes later, depending on the weather.

The winter 1951-52 past uneventful. In spring we went to Brockville for Pessach. Two months after our return to Montreal, we found out that Ruth is pregnant. Yet she continued to work for we knew that once she stops, we can expect difficult times.

I was not the only one concerned, so were Ruth's parents, in particular her father, Mr. Pleet, who was a man of action.

Ruth's parents used to come out for a Sunday sometimes to visit us. A matter of a three hour drive in each direction. Once during an early fall visit, I happen to be alone with Ruth's father for a minute when he said to me: We will have to find something better for you than what you are doing. Pretty soon you will have another mouth to feed and Ruth won't be able to work. You will not be able to support them on what you are earning.

At that time I was already making forty five dollars a week. On a scattered Sunday morning I used to go in to work and get five dollars extra. It was considered good wages at that time. I was not indifferent to the increase in my wages and saw in it the appreciation of my boss for the work I produced. I tried to reciprocate in kind by working even harder. I also knew that the had cutter got the same raises too ad that he was making eighty five dollars a week and not producing more than I did. I felt that if I will tell him that my wife is pregnant and that we are expecting a baby soon, he will hint about a raise.

August went by. In early September, I mentioned to my boss about the fact that my wife is pregnant to which he did not react. Two weeks later I mentioned it again adding that my wife is not working and I will have to ask for a raise of five dollars as soon as the baby is born. In his always polite manner, he replied: There will be no more raises this year. I was hurt. I knew that he knew how hard I worked for him and if there was a need for an exception, it was now, even if he did not intend to give raises to anyone in the place for the rest of the year he should have done it for me. Maybe I was looking at it from my point of view only. I was disappointed because I thought of him so highly. To his workers and to all I have seen, he was always the perfect gentleman.

On Ruth's parents next visit, my father-in-law came with a plan on which he was already working before he even confided in me. His plan was to buy a going concern, like a corner store in those days, where the owner used to stay in the store from morning to almost midnight every day of the week. By putting in two shifts a day, six or seven days a week, doing all the serving by himself, not having the time to spend any money, the owner could be sure of a livelihood.

Ruth's family came with a list of several stores for sale and the two of us set out to look them over.

We looked at a couple stores which seemed to be on the verge of bankruptcy. I was ready to give up, but my father-in-law kept on looking at others. We found one at the corner of Victoria Street and Linton Avenue, a block and a half from our apartment. It was owned by an elderly Jewish man who wanted desperately to sell it. It was a large store, some forty by forty feet. Along the left wall of the entrance was a soda bar at which besides cold drinks were also available sandwiches of all sorts and some pastries, as well as all style eggs, hot dogs and hamburgers. Along the counter were some twenty revolving stools for the customers. The wall facing the entrance was covered with shelves on which one could find a variety of groceries, biscuits and snacks plus a full variety of canned and bottled soft drinks. In front of those shelves stood a counter on which there was a slicing machine for slicing meats. Next to it stood a scale. Next to the counter stood a very long display fridgedare. The lower part held milk and milk products. The upper part, under glass held all kinds of smoked meats, turkey and bologna. Next to the fridge stood glass display cases with all kinds of bread, rolls and pastries. Along the wall to the right of the entrance, the shelved wall was full with a big variety of cigarettes, cigars and tobacco plus an assortment of toys, sweets, chocolates, candy and chocolate boxes. To add to all this, there was an assortment of handy items like writing material, notions and so on. It looked like a good going concern with customers constantly coming in.

It was too good to be true that someone with such a business would want to sell it. My father-in-law asked him outright why. The elderly man pointing at one man working there said; This is my son-in-law. He worked for years in a clothing factory. I bought this store for him and my daughter. (Here he pointed to a woman of about forty standing behind the soda bar,) each of them work here eighty hours a week. They had it for a few years and they are doing well, but my son-in-law got tired working so many hours a day, seven days a week and wants out. He wants to go back to the clothing factory where he worked eight hours a day, five days a week and had the evenings and week ends for himself. Not only this, he wants his wife to stop doing it and come back to a normal life.

The two of them, he continued, are working for four people. Besides them, their two teenage children come to help out after school. It is a good store and we are doing well but without them, I cannot run it. If your daughter and son-in-law are willing to work hard, they will do fine.

Judging by the location it had to be doing well. All around, a lot of residential buildings were going up and this was the only store of this kind in the neighbourhood. The elderly man asked the price and would not budge from it knowing that it was reasonable for that store. Here I saw an agreement which could only by concluded among deeply religious Jews like my father-in-law and that elderly man. Fine, said my father-in-law, it is a deal. You finish today's business and take the cash for the day's sales and leave everything in the store as it is. Take nothing but your hat and give me the keys. They shook hands. My father-in-law gave him the name of a lawyer that would represent him and asked him to be there next morning with his. With that, my father-in-law walked out leaving me for the rest of the day to learn a business in one afternoon and evening. A business of which I did not have the slightest idea.

The store closed at midnight. The owner as agreed, emptied the cashes. He took literally his hat which he put over his "Kipah", gave me the keys, wished me good luck and he and his family drove away. I locked the store and walked home up the street les than five minutes away.

I was in business. True, the store was in my father-in-law's name for a couple reasons. Firstly, there was a balance or mortgage to be paid out weekly to the previous owner for a period of two years at which time the store could not be taken as security for the balance, and my father-in-law was the guarantor providing that he was the owner. Secondly, I myself did not want it in my name. Not having put anything in it and not wanting to carry the burden and responsibility for so much, although I was in fact running it completely.

Not only is Montreal known for its cold winters, it is also known for its hot and humid summers. That summer was no exception. Very few stores had air conditioning at tat time, particularly stores of this kind. During the long and hot summer days, the store used to heat up and by late afternoon and evening, it was unbearable inside. I recall closing the store midnight and hoping that it will cool off overnight but when I opened it in the morning, it was like walking into a furnace.

In those days customers did not hang around in the store too long. They bought want they needed and walked out. The only ones that used to stay a while were those sitting at the soda bar that came in to eat or drink something cool, and even they used to leave as soon as they were finished.

We had half a dozen coolers in the store where we kept soft drinks. As a rule they used to be empty by midnight. It was only at midnight when I used to lock the door that I had to fill them up so they should be cool for the next day.

Throughout those long and hot days, Ruth used to stay with me in the store serving customers of whom many used to remark that she should not do it, for she was noticeably pregnant.

The day used to start at seven. I had to be in the store before eight in order to open at eight. However, before opening I had to take in the rye bread, rolls and bagels from the street where the delivery man used to leave them an hour or two earlier. I would put

them in behind the glass display cases after counting them. Next, I had to take in all the daily newspapers, English and French which were delivered in the early morning hours by the respective delivery vans and stock them up on the stands.

All this had to be done before the customers start coming in and as soon a I opened the doors, they would be waiting to enter. Quite often, they used to be waiting for me to open. The same was with the help. They too had to be there at the opening time. We had three girls working with us. One used to come in at eight and work until four in the afternoon when she was replaced by another one that worked until midnight. A third girl used to come in at ten and work until six in the afternoon when the soda bar was the busiest. The girls job was to serve at the bar only.

To serve the rest of the store we had a man of about thirty five who used to come in at eight and leave at six, five days a week. The same as for the girls. A forth girl used to work shifts in such a way as to make sure that there are enough help on the week ends.

In fact the week end used to be busier than the week days, particularly Sunday evenings when many of our customers used to come back home from a weekend in the Laurentian Mountains. They were thirsty and hungry and would stop by the store to buy bread, rolls, milk, cheese, ice cream, cold brinks and delicatessen.

I can recall Sunday nights that we used to run short of many items.

As soon as the store used to open, the daily deliveries used to start. We kept a variety of white sliced bread from different bakeries and their deliveries used to start one after the other. As soon as one company's delivery truck used to pull away, another one took its place. The same was with the milk, ice cream, cheese, eggs, delicatessen from various companies and a full variety of soft drinks.

As soon as each delivery man used to unload his goods, he gave me the bill and received at once the full payment. I used to get weary having to pay out continually all morning long, morning after morning, so much money not knowing if it will be sold or not. But sold it was and next morning, I was there again with money in my pocket and start all over again.

Saturday and Sunday, the busiest days of the week, the only help I had besides the girls at the soda bar, was my wife Ruth, which was not enough. I arranged for two men to come in those two days a week. They were two survivors of the Holocaust from Romania who came with their families to Canada at about the same time as I and were working in clothing factories. Those extra two days work was a G-d sent gift for them. In fact if I was unusually busy some evening and needed help they were more than happy to come, especially since they lived not far from the store. I knew only too well what it meant to a newcomer with a family, to have a few extra dollars.

My father-in-law came in from Brockville to see how we are doing and realized how hard I worked. After a couple visits, he decided to come in on every second Sunday, so I could have the day off. I sure was thankful for it and took advantage of it to catch up on some needed sleep.

With the beginning of September the weather got cooler and the store more bearable. Across the road was a large so called Protestant school whose student were ninety percent Jewish for the whole neighbourhood at that time was almost all Jewish. They used to say that there are sixteen hundred students there. Lunch time many of them used to come into the store to buy sweets, snacks and drinks. During that hour the store was

like a mad house with as many children as the store could hold yelling, screaming, pushing and shoving, one trying to outdo the other. It was a daily occurrence to see grown up customers trying to push their way to a counter in order to be served and give up in the middle.

Yet I used to put up with it. It was surprising to see how much it amounts to when each small customer spend five or ten cents and the customers come in by the hundreds.

The only drawback regarding the children was that on the right side to the entrance, along the wall, there were many stands with magazines, books, newspapers and comic books. It was the comic books that attracted the children like bees to honey. Those that succeeded to get close to them read them up to the moment the bell rang calling them back to class. There were those, not many, that in the dash to get back to school ran out with comic books hidden under their jacket. We knew of it but were unable to keep an eye on everyone of them.

If keeping comic books was profitable, I do not know. Frankly I was in doubt, but having "inherited" from the previous owner, we continued it.

The most enjoyable time for me in the store used to be Sunday morning. For some unknown reason it became almost a tradition for Jewish men to go Sunday morning to their favourite bakery for fresh bread, rolls or bagel and to the delicatessen store for some lox, cream cheese and other delicacies and bring it home to their family. Here in our store they could get all they needed in one trip, plus the Jewish papers which we used to sell. As in our neighbourhood lived many Jewish newcomers. Sunday morning the store used to be jammed with Jewish men. Some waiting in line to be served, some with their bags full but not wanting to leave a conversation or listening to one. Some discussing trivial subjects like the weather and some much more serious subjects like world politics or anti Semitism. Everything was said in a loud voice as if the power of persuasion lay in the loudness of the voice. I liked to listen to those discussions in between serving the customers. I would listen to the arguments, some silly, some bordering on ignorant but some brilliant. How I would have liked to join them in those conversations, but I was too busy.

The remarks one could hear, the comments, the statements, the absurdity of some of them and the genius of others. To think of them now, they seem so irrelevant. But then they were so applicable, so pertinent to those individuals at that time and to their situation.

With the beginning of October Ruth began to stay home more of the time as the date of the birth of our first child was approaching according to the obstetrician Dr. Gold. In fact I began to run over to the house to see how Ruth was doing.

Friday, the tenth of October (Hashana Rabah) Ruth began to feel the first childbirth pains, but they were long in between coming. In the evening they began to come at shorter intervals. I ran home where Ruth was alone in the apartment but more calmer than I was. When she told me to call a taxi, in great excitement I could not recall our building number nor the apartment number. Ruth had to take the telephone and tell the dispatcher our address. I took her to the Jewish General Hospital and after checking her in at about eight, I went back to the store. We were busy that night as every Friday. At about a quarter to eleven, the phone rang. I picked it up and heard a voice on the other end: This is Dr. Gold. Your wife had a baby. I had enough wit about me to ask what

was it. A boy, he answered. All I remember saying was Thank-you, Thank-you Dr. Gold. I must have said it a dozen times. He finally managed to squeeze in the couple words; You can see her now.

In great excitement I grabbed a box of cigars from a shelf and started handing them out to all the customers in the store yelling: It's a boy! It's a boy! I can still see the surprised looks of some of the customers that did not know Ruth was even pregnant.

Within a few minutes I was in the hospital. Before I had a chance to push the elevator button, the door opened and Dr. Gold, Ruth's obstetrician, steps out. I shook his hand thanking him for his help and got into the elevator. I was directed to a room where Ruth was resting. After a gentle kiss and a few tender inquiries, I asked for the baby and was told to go to the nursery. After writing the name "Kantorowitz" on a piece of paper and showing it to one of the nurses behind a double glass in a room full of babies, she pointed to one of them.

To be honest his almost completely covered face did not look much different from all the others in the room, yet I instantly felt a warmth coming over me towards that not yet one hour old infant. That feeling came to me and over-whelmed me but with much more intensity eight days later. That's when I held him at his Brith Milah (circumcision) tied down on a special contraption before the well known (in Montreal) Rabbi Hirshorn was bestowing on him all the traditional blessings required at such a ceremony according to the laws of Moses and Israel, and having him named with the names of my father Itzchak (Isaak) and the name of my grand father, my father's father Koppel-Yaakov. Both of whom perished together in the gas chambers of Auschwitz on January 1, 1943.

Holding him I was speaking to them all. To both my parents, grandparents, sisters, brother, uncles, aunts and cousins, saying to them, not with my lips but with my heart crying out to them with all my being; Look, here is your continuity. You will not be forgotten. Neither will your names. Despite all attempts, you will live in them. In their souls and in their memories which I intend to instill.

Maybe because of the passing of so many years or maybe my inability to verbalize my feelings at that moment, but all I knew was that I was very excited, very agitated at that time and felt closer to them in heaven than to those on earth.

In those day a woman giving birth to a girl was kept in the hospital for seven days, a boy for eight. Right after the "Brith Milah", Rith and the baby were discharged.

Ruth's parents came from Brockville as soon as I called them with the good news, and helped with bringing Ruth home. After a few days we arranged for a nurse to sty with us and Ruth's parents left for home.

I will admit that the first couple nurses were not to our satisfaction, but Ruth found a nice middle aged nurse by the name of Mrs. Chapman who became like a member of the family and who stayed with us for a year. She slept in the second bed room of our two bedroom apartment with our son whose first name we anglicized to Earl Kenneth.

After a couple of months, Ruth started to come into the store to help out, but not for the length of time she used to. I myself started feeling the physical exhaustion from the sixteen hour a day work, not counting the hour of cleaning up after closing and an hour from locking the store and going to bed. The sixteen hours of each day I was constantly on my feet and on the go. Even my meals which most of the time consisted of a sandwich, I used to eat standing, with one hand holding the food and serving a customer

with the other. If there was no customer for a minute, I could bring up a case of soft drinks with one hand from the basement and start putting the bottles in the cooler.

Even every second Sunday's day off when Ruth's father used to come in for the day to relieve me, did not restore my full energy. I decided to give Carl, the full time worker, the keys to the store. I left him money to start paying out for the early deliveries, and I myself started to come in an hour later.

Thus passed the winter 1952-53. With spring, Ruth began to take our son for walks in a carriage. The most likely place of course, was the store where he used to be admired by the customers whom we got to know pretty well and with some we became friends. Our son, of course in our eyes, was a good looking child, but was indeed a big child for his age taking after Ruth's father's family who were big people. In fact Ruth had a couple first cousins living in Montreal who moved from Ottawa, where the rest of her father's family, the family Pleet, lived.

Ruth's father, Penny (Pinchus) grew up in Ottawa and where he had five brothers and one sister Sarah They were all married and some of them had grandchildren at that time like the older Meir, next Hersh and Avrom. The other two were Aaron and Issie (Isaak). A second sister lived at that time in New York and her name was Goldie, who after the death of her husband moved to Jerusalem to be with her son.

Ruth's mother's family in contrast all grew up in Montreal. At that time Ruth's maternal grandmother, Clara (Kaine) was still living in Montreal on City Hall Street. Ruth's mother's oldest brother Harry (Hersh) was living in San Francisco and so was his brother Hymie (Chaim). Another brother Larry was living in Ellenville, New York and the youngest brother Isroel better known as Irving Layton, and the two sisters Gerti (Gittel) and Esther were living in Montreal. All of them were married with children.

It was their children, Ruth's first cousins that were around our age, some ten years younger and some as many years older. All of them, all of us were working. We were all at our most productive age and knew it. So we worked hard to get ahead.

And get ahead we did.

In the next two years we managed to pay up the balance on the store and could in all honesty say that we owned it. The fear of loosing it by missing one weekly payment on the mortgage was gone and with it the fear of loosing it due to other unforeseen circumstances like sickness or even drop in sales.

Looking back I would say that those were good years. If one does not aspire or demand too much from life. There is no question that I worked hard, punching in twice as many hours a week as the average worker. The physical work compounded by the strain of running the business, which had its daily amounts of unpleasant surprises big and small, is very demanding. Yet we managed to overcome it in no small measure thanks to my willingness to look back to another time, to another era and see how meaningless, how trivial those problems were in comparison to what I have seen and went through.

The daily problems with rowdy teenagers from having to ask them to leave the store to calling the police to chase them out. Catching youngsters at the store's doors with school bags full with comic books and after calling their parents to the store and expecting them to give their children a spanking, it was I who used to get tongue lashed for accusing their children of thievery. One mother even went as far as to threaten me with court action. Of

course there was a dozen people who witnessed the whole affair who were mostly neighbours and who knew that woman and who were not shy to tell her that she was in the wrong.

Still, we had that dollar we needed, even though we had no time to spend it. Yet thanks to Ruth's father who used to come in from Brockville every second Sunday morning, a three hour drive and give me the day off that we could take in some of what Montreal had to offer. In those days Montreal was known for its nightclubs. In fact it was rivalling New York in number. Some used to say that even in entertainment quality. So Every second Sunday night was our night. After a dinner in a nice restaurant we used to go to a nightclub for entertainment and dancing.

Before we even had the store, while we were still working at our respective places, we spent a week each of those two years in New York between Christmas and New Year's.

Unlike now a days we used to walk on Broadway all hours of the night. I remember being there with Ruth at four in the morning looking at and admiring the brightly lit neon signs with never a thought of danger.

This vacation we could not continue. Instead we used to take off a week in summer and go up north of Montreal into the Laurentian Mountains where at that time many Montreal Jews had summer cottages and where one could choose a Kosher hotel to his liking. It was the Montreal equivalent to New York's Catskill Mountains.

One of the nicest was a hotel by the name of "Castle-Des-Monts", situation on an island in the middle of a lake and connected to the.....

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mainland by a causeway. The structure itself was a wooden two story building and fairly old even by the fifties standards, but the privacy of the island, that is the old poplar trees, the beautiful manicured lawns and flower beds made up for other short-comings.

There, one, or rather a couple, could find enough privacy to be out of anybody's sight and ear-shot and spin their dreams if one was young, or reminisce if middle aged or old. For complete tranquility one or two could get on a rowboat and out into the huge lake. Yet the hotel was close enough to be accessible to the nearby small town of "St. Agathe" by taking a 20 minute walk where one could see a movie, browse around in the local stores hunting for souvenirs which were well stocked with tourist attracting merchandise. After all, almost the entire local population lived off the crowd of Jewish vacationers that used to come from Montreal to escape the city's heat in the summer.

The local population was Quebecois (French). Many had small cottages which they used to rent out for the summer to the vacationers, mostly Jewish families who used to spend most of the summer there, while their husbands and bread winners used to work in the city and come out for the week ends. Other locals used to work in the hotels, some of which used to stay open in winter to cater to the skiers who used to ski in the surrounding mountains.

Yet despite the fact that St. Agathe and its surrounding villages main source of income was from tourism and the bulk of them were Jews, there was wide spread anti Semitism there. This did not deter the Montreal Jews from coming there year after year.

This place started to be ignored by the younger Jewish generation that started to frequent the "Borsht Belt", Ruth and I used to enjoy our short vacations in the Laurentian Mountains, coming home rested and refreshed.

Yes, I remember our first two years in the store. True, I did not spend much time at home, but Ruth used to bring our son Kenneth (Ken) as people used to call him, to the store for me to see. To me, he always was and is "Itzekel" after my father's name, Itzchak or Itzik (Isaak).

There are no words to describe my joy watching him change from an infant into a toddler and then into a little boy. There were no words to describe when he started to crawl, or the first tooth, the first word. He was for me everything. My hope, my dream for the future. A kind of resurrection of my family. Above all, its continuity.

I remember the time I took him for his first hair cut. Around the corner from us on Laurier Street where we lived previously, was a barbershop called "Sam's". The owner's name was Sam appropriately, who like myself, was a survivor of the Holocaust and where I used to get my haircuts. I took our son Ken to him one morning, for his first hair cut. The barber had a hard time with him. Little Itzekel started to cry and no amount of calming him down or pacifying him helped. Not only I but the poor barber himself tried to entertain him, but to no avail. I took him off the chair and put him on a little tricycle, which the barber had for such emergencies. I happened to have some "Lifesavers" candy in my pocket and gave them to Itzekel who put them in his mouth. As he was putting it into his mouth, I noticed a few tiny clippings of hair on the candy, which went into his mouth too. I begged him to spit it out, but of course he would not.

With difficulty we got him back on the barber's chair and Sam finished the half-hazardous job.

I dreaded to take Itzekel for his next haircut at which time, to my surprise, he sat like a little gentleman.

How nostalgic one can get for the late summer afternoons when Ruth used to come with him to the store for a while and I used to try to feed him. I used to sit him down on one of the stools and sitting next to him, I tried to feed him. To entertain him I used to take down every available toy from the shelves in order to keep him amused so I could sneak a spoon full of soup in his mouth, or anything else I was feeding him.

When he became sure on his feet, he used to run in the store among the groups of schoolboys playing with their sport cards. At that time, I used to sell bubble gum along with chocolate bars and candy. Each package of gum contained a piece of gum and five picture of known hockey, football or base ball players. School children, particularly boys, tried to collect complete teams. So they used to trade with each other. They finally invented some sort of game by which they used to take turns throwing the cards on the floor. The pile of cards used to grow and eventually one used to win. But while the cards were on the floor, no one was permitted to touch them, much less step on them. Even grown ups coming into the store quickly learned to avoid the scattered cards on the floor to be spared the groans and dirty glances of the children.

Our son Itzekel (Ken) being just over a year old and having just discovered the joy of running, was not particular on or over what he put his little feet. Once Ruth brought him to the store when a couple groups of children were playing with those sport cards. As soon as Ruth let him loose,

he made a dash across the store running over parts of the cards covering the floor. Some of the youngsters reacted with hostility, maybe even would have shoved him out of their way. Then I heard some of them saying to the others to be quiet, that he is Moishe's son.

The youngsters, being afraid that I would not let them play indoors, kept quiet, and tolerated his encroachment on their sacred territory in silence.

In spring of 1954, like the previous Pessachs, Ruth and I went to Brockville to spend the holidays with her family. Ken was not quite a year and a half old. Once I was in Brockville I decided to go by bus to Kingston, a distance of fifty miles but a trip that took two hours due to the frequent stops the bus used to make to pick up and let off passengers. I took our son Ken (Itzekel) with me.

The road in those days led on one side along the St. Lawrence rive and on the other side through countless farms. Only after a year and a half of farming, I tried to be an expert and judge if a farmer is doing well or not. The yardstick was being the quality of the buildings on the farm.

Despite the early time of year many farmers had their cattle outdoors. Itzekel having so far in his lifetime seen only one creature on four legs, was excitedly pointing at the distant cows and yelling "Doggie, doggie." The other passengers smiled benevolently with understanding.

The novelty soon wore off and after a little while the ride lulled him to sleep with his head on my lap, with me stroking his head and back gently. Only a loving father, to be more correct, a true parent knows the feeling of love that pours out from a parent's heart towards his or her child at such a precious and cherished moments.

We went on to the Zbar's house, entering through the store which Mr. Zbar used to look after and which was attached to the house. (Mrs. Zbar had another store on the main street in partnership with Mr. Berlin). It was the first time that Mrs. Zbar saw Itzekel (Ken) and she knew how to put a child at ease. In no time Itzekel began to feel at home and act likewise. He proved it by pulling out the drawers and empting the contents on the floor. I tried to stop him from doing it, but Mrs. Zbar would not let me interfere, saying " He is having a good time. Let him be."

By the time we were ready to leave the house, it was in a mess. I offered to help in cleaning up but Mrs. Zbar would not hear of it. Before parting, she gave Itzekel (Ken) a toy car, quite an elaborate thing made with great detail and of sturdy construction. Enough to say that thirty-five years later, when we moved from Newfoundland to Toronto, that little car was still around. It

survived Ken's childhood years as well as our daughters Sharon and Aviva's early years.

Dear Mrs. Liba Zbar. That noble, kind, benevolent human being. Little did I know that this would be the last time I would ever see her. It is later that I found out that she passed away after a short illness.

Our store was the only one of that kind on the block. Across the street except for the school, there were no other buildings. Going up Victoria Avenue, on the left side was an entire empty block on which a shopping centre was being built. Soon afterwards across the street from us, a new building project was started. Both of those projects employed a lot of workers that used to come in to us for lunch and we were kept busy. However in the fall of fifty-five, the shopping centre was finished and many stores opened up there, which took away some business from us. Never the less, it still remained a profitable store.

Eventually by now the fourteen hours of work a day began to take its toll on me. It just happened that a landsman (townsman) of mine who used to come in from Newfoundland a couple of times a year to Montreal came into the store and started to tell me of his success
in business in St. John's, Newfoundland. When he heard me complain about my long hours and no time for myself to be with my family, he started to talk me into coming to Newfoundland and becoming his partner.

At first I was cool to the idea, but eventually succumbed to the proposition after being exposed to his persistent salesmanship.

When one wants to buy an item badly, one has to pay the price for it. But when one wants to sell badly, one takes a loss. The same happened with the store. We sold the store for a much lower price than it's worth before Pesach 1956 and after Pesach, I left by myself for Newfoundland, leaving behind in Montreal Ruth who was then pregnant and our three and a half year old son Itzekel (Ken).

There were no direct flights from Montreal to St. John's then. To fly to St. John's entailed a stop over in Moncton, Halifax, Sydney, Stephenville, Gander and then one finally arrived in St. John's. That is if the weather was favourable. But the Maritimes and in particular Newfoundland is known for its unstable weather and for its sudden rain or what is worst; Fog. So instead of the two and a half-hours flight that it is today, it was a day's flying time.

I got as far as Gander in the evening, only to find out that the flight to St. John's could not continue due to the fact that the airport in St. John's was fogged in. As there was no road then to St. John's, the only way of getting

there was by train, the so-called "Newfoundland Bullet" because of its slow motion. I was informed that the train was leaving at four in the morning.

It turned out to be a narrow gage train with small and dingy coaches occupied by even filthier passengers. Rugged looking men with unshaven faces, dressed in crude work clothes and laced up heavy boots. Some had them off altogether. The coach was filled with thick cigarette smoke. I noticed however, that some were constantly chewing and then spitting out a dark substance on the floor. It took me a while to realize that they were chewing tobacco. A few were sprawled on the wooden double seats. I tapped a man gently lying on a double seat, but I got no response. I did it again harder expecting a protest or even a curse. To my surprise, the man opened his eyes, looked at me, a stranger in city attire, still half asleep he sat up making room for me to sit down.

After a while we started a conversation. He had trouble understanding me and I found it difficult to understand his unusual English.

Yet I managed to find out that all the men in the coach are woodsmen who are returning home after a long season spent in the woods where they were cutting wood for the large paper mill in Corner Brook. He described the conditions in which they lived in the woods. In particular, the hygiene conditions in which there was no possibility of a bath in months.

As we were traveling slowly through forest whose trees trunks were on the average fifteen centimetres in diameter. I asked him if this is the kind of trees they cut. The answer was that this is the average thickness of trees used for pulp in Newfoundland. I have found out later that spruce or any other evergreen tree does not grow much larger in Newfoundland due to the poor topsoil. This is because of the thin layer of soil over the rocks, or because of the high winds that topple the trees due to the shallow roots in the thin layer of soil.

We had a lengthy conversation in which the lumberjack described to me the life in the lumber camps, the hard work, the difficulty in making a living and the poverty at home. It turned out that despite this man's rough appearance and common language, there was a descent human being near me who worked hard and honestly to support a family.

The train kept on winding and twisting between rocky hills and swampy valleys, curving its way around countless lakes and fir covered hills. Slowing down to a crawl at every turn and twist. I not only thought that I could, but saw with my own eyes, some young passengers getting off and walking along the train at the same speed as the train itself.

No wonder that the trip from Gander to St. John's took ten hours. A distance of two hundred miles.

I quartered myself with my partner and family to await Ruth and our almost four year old son Itzekel (Ken). As Ruth was at that time pregnant with our second child and was due in August and as Ruth's parents were in the process of moving to Montreal, Ruth preferred to remain in Montreal with her doctor and be close to her parents. Besides, she liked the hospital in which she gave birth to our first child. It was the Jewish General Hospital, which was staffed then by locally grown and trained personal of high standards and commitments who were proud to work in a hospital with its name and reputation.

Meantime I had the chance to get acquainted with the city of St. John's. The Jewish community that was there and the part of the island of Newfoundland in which we did our business.

The business consisted of a rented store in St. John's and two small country stores on the Burin Peninsula. One in Fortune and the second in St. Lawrence. It was run by two inexperienced young clerks in each store without any control supervision or proper accounting. The store in St. John's had half a dozen employees. As the two of us partners used to spend four-five days a week out of town, the store in St. John's used to be left completely unsupervised.

We, the two partners used to drive over the crude rough road of eastern Newfoundland, traveling from village to village and selling or to be more precise, trying to sell dry goods consisting of work clothes, underwear, socks, outer wear and a general variety of clothing for men, women and children.

It was like something the eastern European Jews used to do when they arrived in Canada a generation earlier. The only difference was that they carried their wares in a pack on their backs knocking on doors from house to house in the cities and villages of Canada, while we travelled in a large truck full of merchandise trying to sell our wares to the small general stores in the so called "out-ports", or villages spread out along the isolated bays and inlets of the rugged shores of Newfoundland.

One had to keep in mind that at that time there were seventy miles of so called paved road on the whole island. The road led from St. John's to Carbonear and it was so pock-marked with potholes that one had to be more careful to drive on it than on an unpaved road. On the rest of the island, whatever roads there were, they were originally walking paths that in time became roads for horse and buggy. Only lately they were upgraded to a hazardous and risky travel by a motorized vehicle.

It is on those roads that we travelled stopping at little stores to try to sell them our merchandize. After persuading the store keeper to take a look at the samples, we used to bring in the couple suitcases with samples and if we were lucky, we had something that he needed in the stores, so we used to bring it in from the truck.

Even though it rains a lot in Newfoundland, the road in places used to dry fast and the vehicles used to kick up a lot of dust which penetrated the walls of the truck and deposit itself on the merchandise as well as on us. In no time one could get covered with a layer of dust up to half an inch thick.

If I was complaining about the winding railway truck, it paled in comparison with the winding roads which in addition to its twists and turns, were also leading up and down hills or along mountain sides where on one side was a solid rock and on the other a precipice hundreds of feet deep.

A few words about accommodations. One has to keep in mind that in the mid fifties of the twentieth century on the whole of forty two thousand square miles of the island of Newfoundland, there were about a dozen towns and larger settlements that had electric power. The rest of the island had to do without it the best they could. True, there were some households who had their own individual little power motors that could supply enough power to light up one or a couple of homes, but not enough for a single home appliance. Even this luxury could only be afforded by no more than five percent of the population, if this many. So the over-whelming part of the population in the out-ports lived in the same conditions as we lived in Shershev up to 1932, when electricity was introduced in Shershev, or as the rural population around Shershev continued to live, until I left that part of the world.

Understandably where there is no electricity, there can be no indoor plumbing, no running water, no refrigeration, nor radio or television. In short, no electrical appliances of any sort. It took a nice bit of adjustment for a city dweller, especially for one coming from Montreal, which was at that time, the largest city in Canada.

There were no hotels or motels in Newfoundland to speak of, except for the cities of St. John's and CornerBrook and the less than half a dozen so called towns in which a house with a few spare rooms was refered to as hotels. What could be found in some villages were so called "Boarding Houses", where the owner had a larger house and one or a couple spare rooms which he or she used to rent out for a night or two to a casual or accidental sojourner or traveling salesman.

Under such conditions in those places I would not like to guess or wager how often the bedding used to be changed on the beds I slept in. Usually a boarder used to get his breakfast there, too. The customary ham and eggs, toast and coffee. In my case it was different. Two soft boiled eggs, toast and tea.

The other two meals a day we used to buy in the stores, consisting of canned meat or fish and bread. Parking on the side of the road, we used to eat and continue on our way. There were no deserts, fruits or vegetables. The things available in those stores were durable items like turnips, cabbage, carrots and potatoes. The only fruit available just about all year round were five star apples. The only apple that can keep in a barrel just about all year round, never changing its texture or taste which did not appeal to me.

These were my impressions of Newfoundland the first two months after my arrival, which have changed along with Newfoundland during my thirty-three years of our stay there.

As Ruth was due to give birth to our second child in the beginning of August, I left for Montreal at the end of July, to be with her. I still recall those few days. They were trying days for both of us. For Ruth, she was expecting to go to the hospital any hour to give birth, knowing that a day or two later I would have to leave for Newfoundland. As for myself, I did not want to leave Ruth with two children behind. Knowing her concern, and for my selfish reasons, I did not want to part with them even for a short time, for I missed them terribly in Newfoundland. But the main underlying reason and which I could not even share with Ruth, was that my decision to come to Newfoundland, which was my own, was a hasty one and now irreversible.

Saturday, August the fourth, in the late afternoon, Ruth started having labour pains. In the evening I took her to the hospital, and had her registered. They took her upstairs to a room telling me that I would be shortly informed when I could come up to join her until she would be taken to the delivery room.

I waited for about an hour and nobody came to tell me anything. So I walked over to the registration giving the lady clerk my name, but before I had a chance to tell her anything else, she says to me: Mazel Tov, Congratulation. Your wife just gave birth to a baby girl.

I gave a sigh of relief hearing the good news and ran to the elevator. I had to wait half an hour before Ruth was brought to her room.

After spending the allotted time with Ruth, I went back to our apartment in which Ruth's parents were now living with Ruth and our son Ken. I spent a restless night between feeling grateful to the All mighty for giving us a

second child, our first daughter and for the speedy, easy and safe delivery and for giving me the chance to have my daughter carry on my mother's and sister's names, namely; my mother's name Esther, and my older sister's name Sheva, which was anglicized to Sharon. The thought of having to leave my wife and now two children behind and go back to Newfoundland caused me to feel restless as well.

Two days later I went back to St. John's where I spent the summer by myself. Most of the time in the out ports, coming into the city on weekends to look for an apartment for rent which was not easy. At the outskirts of the city, there was an American army base built during the war, which had some six thousand personal, many with families who had taken up every available apartment and space in town.

I finally succeeded in finding one on Patrick Street. It was an old two-story house. The landlord lived upstairs and we on the ground floor and basement. As the house was built on a slope, the basement from the back of the house led into the yard which was overgrown with weeds, shrubs and some dogwoods. In the basement was the kitchen with an old stove converted from wood to an oil stove, a spare room and a bathroom. The rest was used by the landlord for storage. On the ground floor was one bedroom and a double parlour as it was then called. It was a long room divided into two by an arched door that made the room look like two.

The entrance from the front led into a hallway, which was used by the landlord and us. A flight of stairs led to the upper story, which was occupied by him.

Meantime Ruth began to get ready for the transition to St. John's. It was not an easy job with two children on her hands. Ruth arranged to have the furniture crated as well as everything else properly packed. As I recall, the dishes went into five wooden barrels.

The entire shipment left by boat from Montreal to St. John's. A trip of five days. When it arrived it could not be taken into the house because of the size of the crates, so I opened them outdoors. The man in the truck who delivered the shipment from the pier, upon seeing me break up the crates asked me for the timber and planks saying that "they are better than the material now used in building homes." I had no room and no use for them at that time, so I gave it to him.

The big job was of course the furniture. After putting it in place, or what I thought was in place, I left the rest to Ruth. She arrived with our four-year-old son Ken (Itzak-Yaakov-Kopel) and our new born daughter ten-week-old daughter Esther Sharon (Esther Sheva). Accompanying Ruth and the

children was Mrs. Chapman, our nurse that looked after Ken in Montreal for a year. Ruth brought her along to help her on the trip and to settle down in St. John's.

Of course the furniture had to be moved around, but eventually everything fell into place. My partnership in the business, which led a year later to a break up and left me with ten percent of my original investment.

I suddenly found myself without money and without any means of supporting my wife and children.

Those were difficult days for me personally as I blamed myself for getting into this mess by giving up a good running business in Montreal. I was looking for something new and foreign to me in a far and strange place, without checking out thoroughly beforehand what I was getting into. Now I was harvesting the fruits of my naivety and trust in others.

Would I have had the money I invested in that unsuccessful partnership I would have returned back to Montreal to start something on my own. Unfortunately, I did not.

I managed to scrape up enough to make a down payment of six hundred dollars on a second hand van, valued at one thousand. The balance to be paid out within a year and enough to buy a return ticket to Montreal.

On arrival in Montreal, I set out on a visit to the dry good wholesalers, which were mostly located at that time on St. Lawrence Blvd. between St. Catherine Street and Sherbrooke Street.

I knew them from my dealings with them in the previous year while I was still with my partner. I told them that our partnership was now dissolved and that I was starting on my own. Above all, I told them that I have no money and they will have to give me credit.

All without exception were willing to extend me credit of a couple hundred dollars, which I took. One, a very successful wholesaler and importer said to me: I will give you credit of a thousand dollars in consideration of the fact that I started in business over a quarter of a century ago with seven dollars. I like to say right now that in appreciation of this man's trust in me, he must have gotten fifty percent of my business with wholesalers for the next thirty years. This man's name was Ben Mintz.

After a couple days of buying, I returned to St. John's. A week later the merchandise started to arrive. Not having a warehouse I was forced to store it in our double living room which unavoidably became my warehouse.

I was in business. An occupation I never aspired to. In fact, I detested. But what else could I have done? There was nothing I could do in St. John's

to support a family. The only employer of substance was the U.S. Base where to get a job, one needed pull, which I, a stranger did not have.

So I filled up two suitcases with samples, loaded up as much merchandise as I could in the van and set out on the rough and rugged roads of eastern Newfoundland.

Here again I want to point out the fact that at that time many if not half of the settlements of the island of Newfoundland strewn along its coast were not connected to each other or to any other point by land. The only access to them was by sea. However, the provincial government with the help of the federal government embarked on a program to connect the settlements by road, which originally followed a footpath made by generations of inhabitants of those settlements. At times these inhabitants had to but could not go by sea due to weather or the bays being blocked by drift ice.

Those roads used to wind between boulders and swamps, going up hills and down low boggy ground where one foot to the right or left spelled disaster for a weary driver.

The building of those roads began with Newfoundland confederation in 1949 and was very much in progress then.

In my opinion, the eastern part of the island of Newfoundland receives more precipitation in a year in the form of rain, drizzle and fog than any other spot in the northern hemisphere and it had to be that I started in the beginning of October 1957 when rain and fog is at its heaviest. The heavy clouds lie so low to the ground that one could touch them by raising ones hand above their head. They did not disappear until late October or early November, when the temperature falls below zero and the precipitation has changed to snow. The cold weather use to bring on at times winds which blow away the clouds for long enough to assure the stranger that there is still blue skies above the heavy clouds. It was only when the temperature use to drop to below fifteen that the sky cleared and exposes its heavenly blue colours.

How can one imagine now, driving on the Newfoundland paved road the conditions of the roads then when the road was a continuous sea of mud. Then, the vehicle would sit axle deep in the mud and scrape the bottom, tearing off exhaust pipes, breaking fuel lines and break cables. Only one that experienced it could understand what it was like. Add to it darkness that starts at four in the afternoon and fog as thick as the mud below. At night even with the headlights on, it was impossible to see one meter ahead of you. All one could make out is the edge of the road on the driver's side and make sure you do not get to close to it and neither to far or you will get off the road and into the ditch on either side.

This was my beginning. I left Ruth and children with a heavy heart. The pouring rain that added to my misery and made me feel as if the heavens too were crying with me because of the hard times I am in now and of my own making.

It was not easy to come into those country stores, to introduce myself and try to talk a storekeeper into taking a look at my samples. It happened often that after talking for an hour and succeeding in convincing a store keeper to look at my samples, he would not buy anything and I used to walk out dejected.

Still, I knew I had to continue. I had rent to pay, to pay out for the van and above all, to feed a wife and two children. In late November, the snow came down to stay. If the road was treacherous before, it became worse now. In places the road was constantly being drifted over or outright blocked by the drifting snow. In other places the truck used to spin going up a hill or worse. After spinning for a while, it used to start sliding backwards with a good chance of getting off the road and into a ditch or roll into a ravine. Going down a hill, the truck used to start sliding and applying the breaks used to make it even worse.

As soon as I used to leave home, I used to want to come right back, but I knew I could not. In those days, I used to spend five days a week on the road. I would come home to pick up the merchandise, which used to take a day due to the poorly organized system at the wharf. Another day used to be taken up with checking the newly arrived merchandise, making orders in the van and filling it up with the new merchandise. In between I had to go downtown to deposit the whatever money I came back with from the trip and immediately send out cheques to my debtors, so they should not go into a panic as I was a new account and so far untried with them. I was still doing my best to build up trust and confidence with them.

Ruth undertook to help me with the paper work. It entailed entering the invoices, making out and entering the cheques as well as ordering or reordering the merchandise.

In order to save time, I used to leave home in the evening and drive all night arriving at my destination in the morning ready to see the first customer. I soon learned not to leave in the evening if its snowing or even blowing. In such circumstances I used to remain home over night.

At about the same time we found out that Ruth is pregnant. That gave me more impetus to still work harder, as if I needed any more for when I think about it more than forty years later, the driving all night from St. John's to the Burin Peninsula, where some of the settlements were inaccessible half of

the time due to snow in the winter and mud in spring and fall. Where I spent three or four nights during my trips there in unheated homes, sleeping at times with my clothes on, in houses where not only there was no heat but lacking any sanitary facilities. Where eating whatever the little store had to offer.

One would have to keep in mind that a new truck had its wear within a year. How much usage could one get out of a used one? The van needed tires which I could not afford to buy and I recall that once driving from a place called Lead Cove in Trinity bay to Old Perlican, a distance of seven miles in those early days, driving on the freshly grated road on which the blade of the grader turned up some of the rocks on the road exposing their sharp edges.

With my luck I had to be on that road at that time and on the stretch of that seven miles I had six flats (punctures). Understandable I spent all that day on the road fixing tires.

To say that I worked hard would be belittling my sixteen hours a day work. Those little country stores were open from the moment the owner opened his and her eyes, until they went to bed. In fact, most of the stores were in their homes or next door. It was a matter of opening the owner's eyes and he was in the store. Some of the merchants preferred to see me after closing time so as not to be disturbed by their customers.

Yet if the selling itself was difficult and often aggravating, it paled in comparison to the hardship of the driving and the hazards of the road.

With the start of the year 1958, business dropped off. Following in the foot steps of my competitors, of which there was about half a dozen in eastern Newfoundland, all of them working out of St. John's, there was time to go to Montreal and place orders for spring and summer goods. I knew I have to do the same, but unfortunately I owned my suppliers in Montreal fifteen hundred dollars which I did not have and the bank I was dealing with refused to extend me such credit. I was in a bind and did not know to whom to turn to. Out of sixty-eight Jewish families in St. John's, I knew two well enough to ask. One my former business partner with whom I was then not on speaking terms who certainly could have extended me such a small amount of credit or put his signature for such a small amount in the bank for me. The other was a Holocaust survivor from Pruzany who was with me in Auschwitz but whom I got to know in the displaced person camps in Italy. His name was Philip Auerbach (or Uncle Phishel to us) who came to Montreal in 1948 and a year later moved to St. John's. Being single and one of the first two jobbers, he was so to say established, having his steady and

dependent-on-him customers. Despite the fact that I became his competitor, we became instantly best friends in a friendship that lasted to the last day of his life thirty-five years later.

I knew that he would gladly sign for me in the bank if I would ask him, but I guess I was too proud to ask. Eventually I asked my landlord who was himself a manufacturers agent and from whom I used to order some merchandise. Having made out the cheques that I knew would be good, I left for Montreal and New York. I do want to point out that the price of an Air Canada ticket from St. John's to Montreal and back was then one hundred and twenty two dollars. For an extra five dollars, they used to include New York. So I went to New York too for a couple of days staying with my uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach whose children used to pick me up and take me back to the airport. I also want to point out that before my fateful decision to move to St. John's, I managed to pay up my uncle the two thousand dollars he had sent me in 1948 towards my share of the farm.

Upon arriving in Montreal I visited my suppliers-creditors handing them out the earlier made out cheques which constituted the balance of the money I owed them. They in turn seeing a potential customer who so far pays his bills, were not as apprehensive as the first time to extend me credit. In fact, some seemed genuinely interested in selling me merchandise.

My entire trip to Montreal and New York took me a week. As soon as I got back, I went on the road.

My first driver's license I got in Brockville in 1949, but never renewed it as I had no car on the farm or in Montreal.

I applied for a license in St. John's in 1957 which I passed with no trouble. However, the driving on Newfoundland roads at that time in winter was entirely different than the passing of the test in summer on city streets.

As the saying goes: "It never rains but pours" because every penny was for me so important and hard to earn. My untrained winter driving caused me two accidents that cost me some four hundred dollars, which I could ill afford. I guess looking from a positive side, I was the only one involved in it.

During that first winter driving, I had a couple of close calls from which I got away unscratched. One I recall happened to me on Random Island near Clarenville. The island is separated from the main island of Newfoundland by a narrow body of water about a few hundred to a thousand meters wide and the only access to it is by a causeway. There are or were a few fishing villages on that island connected by narrow gravel roads that traversed through rocky terrain, bush, up hill and down to the swamp. One of the worst enemies of the traveller is the freezing rain that can continue at times

all night and build up a layer of ice several inches thick, leaving the surface of the road so slippery that it is impossible even to traverse on foot using a nail pointed cane. The only worse thing is, if that slippery icy surface freezes hard and gets covered with a thin layer of powdery snow. For an unwary driver, or even a pedestrian, it spells disaster.

On such a road I found myself one morning. By then I knew the danger, but sheer desperation , the need to make a living, drove me to it.

A head of me up a hill was a settlement. I took a deep breath and pressed on the gas. As soon as I started on the up hill, I knew I made a big mistake, for within a few seconds, I lost control of the steering wheel and thus the van slid off the road into the ditch. I made my way on foot for the next few hundred meters to the settlement.

Knocking on the door of the first house, a middle-aged man let me in and I explained my situation to him. He told me to go back to the van and wait for him. Within no more than fifteen minutes, he was back with a dozen or so men in tow. It took them a few minutes to get me on the road and turn the van around by sheer strength, as there was no way I could turn around on that narrow and slippery road. I was so grateful to those people that I was ready to pay them anything. To my question of how much I owe them, they just smiled. The man from the house I first knocked on waved me away saying: Next time you come bring with you a bottle of rum. A decent act from a poor but benevolent people.

Another story. Having just passed Whitborn crossing on my way home, on the narrow and winding road, I took a bend in the road not appreciating the ice on it and the van rolled over on the side. Not a single vehicle passed without stopping, and as soon as there were enough men, they put the van on its wheels. Nobody would accept any sort of remuneration.

However, there was a benefit for me due to the thick layer of snow on the road. It protected the well-worn tires from the sharp edges of the rocks below, thus less flats on the tires. It would have been good if not for the fact that one would not dare travel on those snow covered roads without putting on snow chains on the tires which in turn would chafe through the walls of the tires or break. In particular the links which demanded immediate attention. In a word : one could not win fighting the elements.

In May, the precipitation started coming down in the form of rain or fog, eating away at the layer of heavy snow, and like in the story of Noah, the land began to appear from beneath the mountains of snow.

The time for the birth of our third child was getting near. As I could not stay at home to be with Ruth and our two children, we decided that Ruth

should go with the children to Montreal and stay with her parents. We had nobody in St. John's to leave our son Ken (Itzhak who was six at the time) and our daughter Sharon,(who was two at the time), so we thought that this would be the best solution. Secondly, she had the doctor who was with her at the birth of our two children in Montreal and Ruth was familiar with the Jewish General Hospital.

Ruth left with the children in the middle of May and I followed two weeks later.

On June the fourth in the evening, I took Ruth to the hospital. After having her admitted, I joined her upstairs where the doctor told her to walk up and down the hallway. At about eleven before midnight, they took her to the delivery room, leaving me with another couple expectant fathers.

I sat and then I started to walk up and down the room which seemed to become very small, so I started walking up and down the hall-way finally going over to the head nurse on duty to ask her for any news. Then I went back into the waiting room and sat down. No sooner did I sit down when the head nurse comes in and says: Mr. Kantorowitz, your wife just gave birth to a baby girl. My first question to her was? When can I see my wife?

It did not take long and I was permitted to see Ruth and a short while later our newborn daughter who was even fairer than the older one and as beautiful as the sun. She was born at twelve ten. Ten minutes after midnight on the day of June 5, 1958. She was named after Ruth's great aunt Chayie-Sorah and we called her Aviva Simone.

Ruth and the children remained in Montreal with her parents a couple of weeks more. But I returned to St. John's two days after Aviva's birth.

The difficulties with the roads of Newfoundland did not cease with the disappearance of the snow. In fact it got worse. While the problem with the snow continued throughout the entire winter, it seldom blocked the roads for more than a few days at a time. There were times when a vehicle got stuck in a snowdrift, the driver could dig himself out or wait for a snowplough which would eventually come weather permitting. But with the frost coming out of the ground, the road used to turn into a bottomless bog. Unlike snow, one could not dig his way out of it, for the oozing slime from around used to fill up the place immediately.

I stand corrected. In order for the reader to understand the difficulties of traveling over the Newfoundland roads in those days, I like to share with him/her an event which took place in December of 1957 that could have caused me a lot of hardship were it not for a fluke decision I made on the spur of the moment.

Already in my first year in Newfoundland, I heard stories that the train running across the island, that is from Port-Aux-Basques to St. John's used to encounter a freak snow storm that could block the tracks for weeks at a time.

Allowing even for exaggeration I heard first hand from a fellow traveler who was stuck on the train several days before the tracks were cleared and the train could proceed.

Another told of an event when the wind was so high at a place called Topsoil, east of Corner Brook, that it toppled the narrow gage Newfoundland trains on its side.

But I never expected to be witness to the Newfoundland freak of weather and its surprises.

It happened in mid December 1957. A snowing and blowing short day. I was traveling on the south shore on the way from St. John's to Trepassey, the most southern settlement on the Avalon Peninsula. On the way I made a few stops to visit my other customers in the settlements along the shore, in places like Bay Bulls, Witless Bay, Cape Broyle, Calvert, Ferryland and Renews. I was just leaving Renews at four in the afternoon, under a heavy sky, and it was already getting dark. It was snowing all day and there was a foot of snow on the road. Ten miles down the road was a small settlement by the name of Capahayden and twenty miles beyond was my objective, Trepassey. Capahayden and Trepassey were the most treacherous stretches of roads in this kind of weather. Even in summer, on a foggy day, one could not dare to walk off the road and loose sight of it for a moment for he would not find it again. Those twenty miles were so bleak and depressing, barren of any trees or shrubs that could serve as a point of orientation. An unending plain, flat as a table and the road on level with the ground could easily be obscured by the countless protruding rocks all around.

In winter, the entire flatland used to turn into an eye biting disorientating endless space where one had to drive with special and increased care in order not to get off the road which was constantly being covered over by the drifting snow.

If one was unfortunate to get off the road, it meant to wait for an oncoming vehicle, at best a few hours and usually over night.

Not surprising I did not relish the idea of traveling the next thirty miles in the dark during a snowfall. But as they say, "Necessity breaks iron". I had to work and provide.

The light snowfall became heavier and I became apprehensive. Yet there seemed to be less snow on the road. I soon learnt why. In a few minutes I

caught up to a snowplough which started from the settlement half an hour ago. The driver asked me if I care to pass him. After one look at the road ahead of me, I declined. The driver of the plough had trouble finding the road and his progress slowed down to the speed of a person's walk. I soon realized that at this speed we will be lucky to get to Trepassey in the morning. I guess the driver of the plough came to the same conclusion. He stopped to inform me that he will spend the night in Capahayden and continue to Trepassey in the morning. I made my own calculations and realized that instead of one day, this trip will take me three at best, as it will take me all the next day to get there.

I arrived home after midnight, driving in a heavy snow fall that over night blanketed the entire Avalon Peninsula in a layer of snow which paralysed it for a couple of days.

Out of sheer curiosity I called the high way department to find out if the plough made it to Trepassey that night and was informed that the following day he broke down between Capahayden and Trepassey and that they had sent more ploughs there to open the road.

The end of the story is that that stretch of road between Capahayden and Trepassey remained closed until sometime in April, a period of four months. When I finally managed to get through to Trepassey in the end of April, I counted some half a dozen pieces of equipment that were left abandoned on the road. Broken down in their attempt to open the road. Victims of the Newfoundland weather and the state of the roads in those days.

To the above story I am a witness and I witnessed the road being closed for four months due to snow. Maybe the story I heard from a man who claimed to have spent forty-two days on a train on his way from Port-Aux-Basques to St. John's in the twenties is credible too.

Now let us turn to early spring 1958. One of the four territories I used to cover was Bonavista-Bay south. A trip of five days, which led through Whitbourne, the Avalon Istmus via Gubis to Clarenville. A distance of a hundred and twenty miles and took a day, including a couple of stops to visit customers, providing the road was in 'good' shape. Otherwise, it could take two days. From Clarenville via Shoal Harbour to Milton, after which a couple of miles further, the road used to take a sharp left turn to Lethbridge, a distance of a dozen miles.

It was this part of the road, from the turn to Lethbridge that the bottom fell out of it, and the road became impassible.

To begin with, the road was built on a swamp the previous summer. It was opened with the cold spell freezing the ground below. As soon as the frost

started coming out in the spring, the weight of the heavy trucks broke through the layer of gravel and stone changing the road into a trap for trucks and cars. To be honest, the highway department made attempts to fill in the holes, but regardless of how much and what it was they dumped on the road, it all disappeared in that quagmire.

At first, after dark, when the temperature used to drop to freezing, a man who lived along that stretch of road, owned a four wheel drive truck with balloon like tires, used to organize a caravan of cars and trucks. For the price of five dollars from each vehicle, he used to escort us across that obstacle course. As soon as one of us got stuck, his twenty odd year old son used to jump down the truck, hook and cable in hand and in no time one was out of the hole.

However, as soon as it got warmer and the ground stopped freezing at night, the road became impassable for any vehicle. The high way department was compelled to close the road for six weeks, until it dried out and they could proceed with repairs.

The above mentioned were extreme cases. However, since most of the roads were built on solid rock or bog, the rocky stretches tended to form potholes, which in turn caused breaking of springs and shock absorbers. In contrast the stretches of road over boggy terrain used to turn into a sea of mud, where one had to drive axle deep in thick heavy soup, tearing off mufflers and exhaust pipes.

On those roads at that time of year, there was hardly a trip after which I did not have to take the van into the garage for repairs. An expense I could not afford, not to mention the fact that due to the road conditions some settlements became inaccessible thus loss of sales.

By the end of June 1958, spring in Newfoundland was in full bloom, but even June had its surprises. I recall spending the night of the tenth to eleventh of June in a small motel on the road between Lethbridge and Southern Bay in Bonavista Bay. As I woke in the morning, the eleventh of June, I looked out of the window and could not believe my eyes. The beautiful green landscape of yesterday was covered with a thick layer of snow. I had to walk a foot deep in heavy wet snow to get to the van, getting my feet wet in the process.

I was going in the direction of Bonavista. The first settlement on my way was Charleston and the next was Princeton. A small settlement at the foot of a mile long hill called Summerville Hill named after the settlement on the other side. That hill had a sinister reputation not only over the Bonavista Peninsula but also across the entire island of Newfoundland among those

who ever had to get over it, or were confronted by it. That hill was not only steep and in some places went up at an angle of 45 degrees , which could only be traversed by making a run for it. But the winding road often hindered such an attempt.

In mid morning I was at the foot of that hill and saw the plough struggling to clear the snow which was well over a foot deep. By the time the plough cleared the other side of the hill, the mid June and midday sun was out in its full strength melting the snow faster than it must have came down, changing the ditches on either side of the road into raging torrents. It forced me to drive up the hill for fear that the road would get washed out, which often happened after a good rain.

Such were the road conditions in Newfoundland in the fifties.

As soon as the roads dried out, a driver would be confronted with another nuisance, namely dust. A vehicle would kick up a cloud of dust a mile long if there was no cross wind to blow it off the road and the dust had the tendency of penetrating every crack of the vehicle, no matter how tight it was. It settled everywhere and on everything. It was most noticeable on the heads and faces of the travelers. Even almost hermetically closed trucks did not escape this plague and the sand managed to enter sealed boxes in my van.

The only way of escaping this nuisance was either leaving a lot of space between the vehicle a head of you or attempt to pass him, which was practically impossible, for the closer you got to the vehicle, the thicker the dust. It got to the point where you did not see a thing in front of you.

In such weather one prayed for rain which was answered more often and for longer periods than asked for. The rain changed the roads into mud.

No wonder there were so few travelers then in Newfoundland and even fewer cars.

The nurse that came with Ruth and the children to St. John's after the birth of Aviva, left after a month, for we could not afford to keep her. Ruth replaced her with a local girl from Trinity Bonavista Bay by the name of May. She stayed with us for over a year. In that time she found herself a young man whom she married and moved back home.

Besides the difficulties of trying to make a living, the place we lived in was unbearable. With three little children at home and the living room taken up with merchandise, there was no room to turn around. Not to mention the exorbitant one hundred and twenty five dollars monthly rent at that time, which we were paying. I started to look around for a larger and cheaper accommodation.

At either end of Elizabeth Avenue new subdivisions were coming up. At the west end a couple new small streets were being completed. I found out that there were some houses for sale at the price of nineteen thousand dollars, and that a second mortgage can be arranged. All one needs is two thousand dollars down payment. The monthly payment of one hundred and twenty eight dollars on the first mortgage equals to what I am paying now in rent. All I had to pay was thirty-three dollars a month on the second mortgage, which sounded fine. But where do I get the two thousand for the down payment?

Here I have a chance to own my own home with a full basement, which would be perfect for a warehouse. A garage with additional room and a door to the driveway. How can I pass it up?

The only one I could turn to and I did was my good friend Philip Auerbach, who gladly offered to sign for me as guarantor in the bank for the needed down payment.

I undertook to repay the two thousand dollars in fifty-dollar monthly payments as long as it would take. What I can proudly say is that I did, never missing a payment, that for me in that financial situation was no small accomplishment.

In the beginning of October 1958 we moved into our new and so called own home on 21 Gambier Street.

At that time we were one of the two families that kept Kosher in the St. John's Jewish community of some seventy members, which all considering was no small task. Help came via Ruth's parents who for a house warming present bought us a large deep freeze, in which we could keep enough frozen food to last for months. Not only did Ruth keep there Kosher meat and meat products, but there was room enough for Kosher bread and cakes, which I used to bring with the meat on my return from buying trips to Montreal.

That same fall, our son Ken (Itzhak-Yaakov-Kopel) started school which was some hundred meters from our previous living quarters. He entered Harrington School on LeMarchant Road. Until October while we were still living in the old place it was very convenient, but from our new home, it was quite a distance and required changing buses. Ruth had to take him to and from school daily, by bus leaving our two little girls Sharon (Esther-Sheva) and Aviva (Chaya-Sarah) with our maid, May Brown, at home. Of course if I happened to be in town during school days, I used to do it by driving him with the van.

Actually he started going there a year earlier to kinder garden and continued into grade one. After finishing grade one, he, to be more precise,

his class was transferred to Holloway School in to grade two, where he continued up to the end of grade six. To Holloway School, starting in grade two, Ken used to take the bus and transfer by himself.

No vehicle in those days could stand the punishment of Newfoundland roads for too long. It was fine for driving around town, but those of us who did their driving in and around the out-ports, and in particular those who used to put on some fifty thousand miles per year, like myself, soon realized that the life expectancy of a new vehicle on those roads can not exceed two years, even with constant repairs. It was not the motors that would give out. They lasted but it was the body and structure that used to come apart in every conceivable and inconceivable place.

My van, which was second hand for me to begin with, despite all the repairs had "had-it". The fall season just began, in my line the most promising time of year and I was spending more and more time in the garage. I went to the garage "Marshall Motors" from whom I bought the van, to negotiate the purchase of a new vehicle. They accepted the old van as a down payment and I took on the obligation to pay the balance of twenty four hundred dollars in twelve monthly payments of two hundred dollars each.

It was a new Ford truck, cab and chassis. I found a man in By Roberts who built on a box, so called "a house" on it, fourteen feet long, seven feet wide and six feet high inside, with shelves on all the walls covered with sliding doors to protect the merchandize from falling out on the floor.

What a far cry from the little old van where the merchandize was all in card-board boxes, one on top of the other, where I had at times to empty most of them to find a certain item. Here every item was in its place where I knew where I put it, very accessible, not to mention the size of the box where I could and did carry four five times as much merchandize in quantity and variety than in the van.

The truck and chassis were much heavier and held the road much better. Not to mention the dual wheel advantage of being able to continue driving to the next garage with a flat on. Not the best idea, but useful at times.

With a brand new truck and tires, with no fear of punctures at any moment or engine failure, I seemed to be invincible regarding the road or so I thought.

I soon found out that I was wrong. Already on my first trip out, I managed to break off the front shock absorber plates, which became a routine problem on every trip. Not surprising, considering that at any time, driving, one of the wheels was constantly either getting in or getting out of a pothole.

But the real test came in early March 1959. That winter, 1958-59 was a hard one even for Newfoundland standards. It started early with no let up, one snowfall after another.

As February was the slowest month of the year, I have learned from my competitors to go to Montreal to do my shopping for spring and summer. Almost all wholesalers, importers and manufacturers of clothing in Canada were concentrated in Montreal in those days. In fact Montreal was known to be the centre of the textile industry of Canada.

As for me, a beginner in the business, my source of supply could be found on one block of one street in Montreal, namely; on St. Lawrence Blvd. With my very limited buying power, I could be through with my shopping in three days. Thus giving me the opportunity to visit my relatives. That is, my Uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach and family, who had by that time moved from 2133 Daly Avenue in the Bronx to Brooklyn, where they got an apartment in the same building as their youngest son, Eli and his wife Shirley. That building is 829 E. 10th Street.

As a rule I used to spend the weekend there, thus getting the opportunity to see most of their children who were working during the week. At that time my other Uncle Pesah (Philip), who was my Uncle Shloime's brother, lived in New York with his wife and married children who came to meet me.

During my visit there my Uncle Shloime and Auntie Esther's house used to become an open house, and my uncle's two daughters, Helen and Rose were being kept busy serving food and drinks to the visitors.

It was only later, after my uncle and aunt past away, and the two daughters were older, that I realized how much work and effort it took them to keep all the guests fed, entertained and busy during my visits. I am not so sure now if I ever thanked them properly for all those sweet memories I carry with me now.

On the way back I used to stop for a day in Montreal to do our personal shopping. That is the bread and meat order.

Checking in at the airport, the Air Canada employees never failed to remark about the pleasant aroma coming from the boxes of baked stuff I was checking in. Nor about the amount of boxes. Upon arrival in St. John's airport, I had to take a taxi for myself to get home instead of sharing it with others which was the practice, as I had enough boxes to fill a fare size car.

The end of February that year, I tried to cover the two territories closer to home. They were, the peninsula lying between Trinity and Conception Bays, the so called South Shore, that is the shore line between St. John's and south

to Trepassey and part of Placentia bay that is from St. John's via Whitbourne to Dunville, Jerseyside, Placentia, Freshwater, Argentia and Fox Harbour.

This was a cluster of settlements close to one another with full employment due to the large American naval base nearby.

Despite the stories that the road to Burin Peninsula is treacherous, and that the amount of snow is high, I could not afford to stay home an extra day or two.

I will take a couple of lines to describe the road to the Burin Peninsula at that time.

The first and one of the larger settlements on the peninsula is Marystown. That was two hundred miles (320 kilometres) from St. John's. One hundred miles, half way between was a small settlement called Goobies. From Goobies to Marystown, except for a place called Swift Current some fifteen miles past Goobies, there was no settlement on the road all the way up to Marystown proper. True, there were some settlements on the way, but not on the road or near it. They were some miles away, off the road. About half way between Goobies and Marystown, the road branched off to a place called Terrenceville, about twenty miles away. Before that branch road, and past, for about thirty miles, the ground was very level with hardly a tree in sight or a hill to abstract the drifting snow. The road which was level with the ground around it, was constantly exposed to the drifting snow. The high road department was sending ploughs to push the snow off the road which in turn kept accumulating on either side of the road forming embankments, which in turn used to trap the drifting snow thus blocking the road faster and deeper. Again, the plough had a harder time pushing the snow aside and building up the snow embankments even higher.

It used to get to such a state that the embankments on either side fo the road used to rise to the height of a truck and higher. In such cases the plough was useless. It could not budge the three yard deep snow and pay loaders had to be brought in to do the gruelling and slow task of removing the snow.

That part of the road for some unexplainable reason was named "Terrenceville Road", and every person that knew that stretch of the road and used to traverse it from time to time used to pronounce even that name with repugnance or aversion.

In the past three years I had learned to respect the Newfoundland winters, but I guess, not enough. Of course, there was always the necessity of making a living that drove me to leave a wife and three small children, a warm home and go out into the stormy day or night on treacherous roads risking limb and life for the so called "livelihood".

So on an early March day I left home for the Burin Peninsula. The first half or hundred miles were not too bad. I got as far as Goobies and spent the night there in a small motel, the only one on the Burin Peninsula. I left the place in the morning and covered the fifteen miles to Swift Current. I saw a customer and left for Marystown eighty-five miles away. Right past swift current up a long and steep hill, reaching the beginning of the so-called "Terrenceville Road". The flat and monotonous sixty miles of flat land. I drove right into what looked like a tunnel. On either side were high walls of snow, at times higher than the truck. There was no danger of getting off the road. I could not if I tried, for the walls of snow on either side were high and wide. The problem was that in places there was no room for the plough to push the snow and a lot of it remained between the two walls of snow, right on the road and the truck used to get stuck in it. Every so often I had to dig myself out.

Every couple of miles a bulldozer widened the road so as two vehicles could pass each other. But it did not happen this way too often. Usually you met a vehicle half way between such places and one had to back up a mile or two.

Fortunately there was no traffic on the road, for who would travel on such a road in this condition? I did meet a couple of ploughs and a bulldozer who were trying hard to keep the road open.

Somehow I made it to Marystown. There I felt better for from here the road led via settlements ten-fifteen miles apart all around the tip of the peninsula. There were settlements like Creston, Salt Pond, Lewin's Cove, Burin, Mortier, Epworth, Little St. Lawrence, St. Lawrence, Lawn, Lord's Cove, Point-Au-Gaul, Lamaline, Lories, Fortune, Grand Bank and Garnish, and from there some twenty miles back to Marystown.

Each of those places had a potential customer, for the local stores did some business. Due to the road conditions, the local population had to buy from the local store.

However, because of the amount of snow on the road, I lost a whole day and got to Marystown Friday evening at nine o'clock. As I drove by a gasoline station, I notice the truck of my competitor and friend, Philip Auerbach. I stopped to chat. He too is on his way home. It is a beautiful evening. Not a breeze in the clear air, nor is there a cloud in the sky. The heaven is lit up with its millions of stars. The next house on the road is thirty miles away. It is the only one up to Swift Current eighty-five miles further. He, Philip just filled up his gas tank and wants to get there where they serve meals and have accommodations for travellers. I see no reason to set out at

nine in the evening on a thirty-mile trip. The way the roads were and with my luck, it would take two hours if not more. I suggested to stay over night right here in Marystown. He, Phillip goes on and I remain in Marystown over night.

I am up at six and leave Marystown with daybreak at seven. The sky is overcast and a light snow is falling. Nothing to worry about. The terrain is uneven, but the road is protected in most places by hills, rocks, and small woods. Still, the thirty miles to where Phillip was aiming last night, took me the predicted two hours. I pull up and do not see Philip's truck. I figure he left earlier. I go inside and find out that Philip did not spend the night there. Nor did anybody see him. I did not see his truck on the road, so he did not get struck. Is it possible that he continued home last night?

I fill up with gas and am about ready to start the engine, when I see a little Volkswagen pulling up and two men get out and walk in the direction of the house. I ask them where they are coming from. They say "Terrenceville". More from habit than curiosity, I say: Will I make it there? They hesitate before saying; you can try. One of them adds, "With a truck you might." I look at the two husky men in their prime with a touch of scepticism, thinking to myself; How can you compare yourself in that little car to my truck. Bidding them good-bye, I pull away.

The twenty miles between the place I just left and Terrenceville branch can be divided into two even parts. The first ten miles led through a wooded area. The other ten were open terrain. As I was driving through the first ten protected miles, I was thinking to myself: How easily some people get scared of a few flakes of snow. True, the light snow continued and was falling softly on the road, which had already much snow on it. It seemed to make little difference.

And so the snow continued to fall softly, even gently, covering the road with a constant deepening layer of snow. I was feeling good moving forwards without apparent hindrance or problems. Suddenly and without warning, I drove into a different world. I came out from behind the protection of the trees into open space where the wind was blowing snow with an intensity that obscured and reduced visibility to zero. The road in front of me disappeared and a wall of grey mass surrounded me. Now I understood what the two men from Terrenceville meant when they said: "You can try." And try I did! I began to move forwards, inching my way a yard at a time, more by instinct than by sight.

After two or three miles, what seemed like an infinity I stop to see two men near a bulldozer. They were trying to start it in order to clear the snow.

It made me feel better knowing what they will be doing and I moved forward invigorated.

The storm, however, did not let up. In fact it seemed to get worse and after a mile of driving I got off the road and into a shallow ditch. After trying for half an hour to get back on the road but to no avail, I turned back on foot to try and get those two men with the bulldozer to get me on the road. I barely started to walk, when I heard sounds of a motor. In that storm it took me some seconds to assess the direction the sound was coming from. It was the direction I was travelling to. By the time I got back to the truck, a snowplough was coming towards me. The driver, by the name of Pat, whom I knew, came from Terrenceville and had been working on the snowplough for a long time. He got me out of the ditch and on the road in minutes. To my question if I should continue, he told me that as far as the Terrenceville branch goes and from where he is coming, I should have no problems. Further on is not his territory, but he assumed that its being ploughed.

We parted going in opposite directions. Sure enough, I continue with no trouble. After all, the plough was just there. I got to the Terrenceville branch where I had to turn right to Swift Current and Goobies, a distance of fifty miles. I was on an elevation with the road sloping gently down to the bridge over Don's River. The slope helped to propel the truck easily and before I realized, I was in the middle of the road. Two feet deep in wet and heavy snow.

I was stuck. Unable to go forwards or backwards. There was no choice. Ahead of me, the snow was even deeper. I had to go back for shelter until the storm and the snow blowing were over. I dug all the snow around the truck. Perspiring profusely, I got into the truck and managed to turn around. Before me were the over twenty miles of track I just covered. The only difference was that I had to confront the ten difficult miles first and then the ten sheltered ones in order to get to that little place where I met the two men from the Volkswagen this morning. Some-how I managed and got there in early afternoon.

No sooner did I arrive than from the opposite direction, that is from Marystown side, pulls in another truck. It was a bit smaller than mine. Two men get out. I know them. It is Mr. Case, a candy wholesaler, who sold from his truck all kinds of sweets to the stores, and his helper, a young man in his early thirties by the name of Walter. We fill up with gas, in between having a conversation regarding the weather and road conditions.

I told them what it is like further down the road and me being forced to turn back. They are anxious to continue. The young man, Walter, makes

nothing of my warning and looks at me with the same sceptical gaze that I looked at the two men from the Volkswagen this morning. The two decide to go on and start to talk me into following them.

Here is where my heart conquered my brain. My desire to get home was so strong that it overtook my common sense. I just came back knowing that there is no way for me or any other vehicle to get through, yet I wanted to get home so badly that common sense was blindly being pushed aside and I agreed to follow them.

Again the first ten miles were uneventful except for the deeper snow on the ground. But as soon as I got out from behind the shelter of the trees, I drove again into a grey and blinding wall of drifting blowing snow. The only thing I could see was the freshly made tire tracks of Mr. Case's truck just ahead of me. I was driving on a slight down hill. As I was very slowly moving forward, the walls of snow on either side of the road were getting higher. They were reaching the height of the box of my truck thus creating even a better trap for the snow to fall into. I was driving in low gear, for two reasons. One, the truck was sitting so deep in snow that it would only move forward in low gear. Secondly, the truck ahead of me was so close that in a higher gear I had not chance of stopping before slamming into him, should he suddenly decide to stop.

I follow the truck for about a kilometre when suddenly my truck found itself so deep in snow that it started spinning. Unable to go forward, I tried to back up to no avail. It would not go. I was stuck. In panic I got out of my truck and started to run after the one ahead of me. It was humanly impossible to walk. Never mind to run. Besides the hip deep snow, the high wind, blowing the snow in my face and eyes making it hard to breathe or to see anything.

With difficulty I made my way back to the truck and closing the doors and windows I was out of the wind if not the cold.

It was about five in the afternoon when I settled myself to wait out the storm reproving myself for letting those two talk me into following them. Seeing the storm started in the early morning, I rationalized that within an hour or two it will start subsiding and an hour later the plough will be there to open the road.

To my chagrin, the minutes turned into hours and I sat inside, cold and wet. From time to time I turned on the headlights to see how much deeper I was getting buried in snow from hour to hour. I was afraid to turn on the motor as the exhaust pipe was now deep under the snow and beneath the truck and besides, I didn't want to run out of gas.

Every hour seemed to be a year. It was midnight and still no let up. Finally before dawn, the wind died down and the snow stopped. An hour later a bright sun came up and a clear blue cloudless sky wrapped itself around my universe. Neither I, nor anybody else would believe that the storm that was engulfing me only three hours earlier, could disappear so suddenly and vanish like a phantasm that it was. Except that it left its mark all around me. I tried to get out but could not open the doors of the cab, as the space between the two banks of snow on either side of the road was completely filled in with snow. I finally succeeded to get out by rolling down the door's window, pushing with my hands the snow in all directions and pushing myself through another meter of snow to find myself on the roof of the truck.

What a beautiful view yet frightening. As I stood on the roof of the truck I could see for miles in all directions a white glittering stretch of snow in which nothing was moving and no sound was heard as if all life on earth had ceased. There was no sign of any form of life, for the road that was there yesterday was covered completely by the same deep blanket of brilliant snow. If I were not so distressed with my situation I would have appreciated the view much more. But how could I? Here I am on a Sunday morning at least twenty miles away from a human being, unable to reach anyone nor can anyone reach me as the road had been completely obliterated. And considering that I had not eaten since Saturday morning, the dreaded feeling of hunger began to frighten me. I remembered that I had a can of orange juice and two ten cent chocolate bars in the cab. (At that time a chocolate bar was selling for ten cents.) It did not take me long to get back into the cab and finish it off, washing it down with the orange juice.

There I stood on the roof of the truck getting blinded by the bright sun and still brighter snow looking out in the direction to where I figured the road is and hoping that something or somebody will appear. Staying on top of the truck was much more pleasant than sitting in the cab which meant to be in the shadow. Here, exposed to the sun I not only felt warm but my clothes, which got wet Saturday morning, were beginning to dry on me. The truck which was sitting on the road between the two banks of snow on either side was barely visible. I wanted to move around but where? The snow that blocked the road was three meters deep in front and behind the truck. If I were to step on it, I would sink in it over my head. I realized that by extending my step to a meter from the rim of the truck, I could reach to the crest of the snow bank, which was firm and frozen. I did, by it extending the length of my walk several dozen metres. Of course I had to balance myself

on the crest of those snow peaks. A fall on either side would bury me in a coupe metres of snow.

At about noon, suddenly and as if in a mirage, in the distance appeared two human like silhouettes. Slowly they were coming closer. Even from the distance I could tell their laborious effort. It must have taken them an hour to cover the last mile. Of course I recognized them much before they got to me. They were Mr. Case and his helper Walter.

They briefed me on what happened to them last night. They did not realize that I am not following them for quite a while. By the time they did, they knew where I got stuck for it was the worst piece of the road so far. It was too risky for them to try and turn back, so they continued for another mile or so, until they too got stuck.

In the morning, with a beautiful sun, they set out on foot to retrace their route to find me. Satisfied that I am fine they left for their truck some three miles away.

All that day, Sunday, I keep on hoping that a plough will come along to open the road but to no avail. And so did the Sunday pass and another long lonely and cold night. Just before dawn, Monday, I dozed off for an hour or so. I awakened to another bright morning. Getting out of the cab onto the roof of the truck, in the bright sunlight I saw to my delight a plough trying to make his way towards me.

Throwing all caution aside, I began to run towards the plough, which seemed to be making little progress. I kept on running falling at time and burying myself over my head in snow, but it did not stop me. It took me a good hour to cover the mile separating me from the plough. One glance and I could tell that the plough was in trouble. he was in between the two snow banks that ran along the length of the road and was approaching the stretch where the banks were highest and full to the rim with snow. There was no place for the snow to go, except forward, where the pile of snow was higher than the cab of the plough. Behind the plough was a truck that carried extra fuel. I knew both drivers. They had been working all night. They too realized that it is a job for a pay-loader to open the road. The snow had to be simply dug out and thrown over the mountains of snow by the roadside. Meanwhile they were hungry and decided to go the twenty miles back to that little restaurant from where I started out twice on Saturday only to return after every time.

The two drivers and I got into their truck and drove the twenty miles in no time, for the plough had opened it a few hours back and the weather held.

We arrived and found quite a few vehicles there. People that tried to go from the Burin Peninsula to St. John's, but now were waiting for the road to open.

The place belonged to a family from Bay-L'argent. He was a slim man about sixty. She was a few years younger and was tall and hefty and had the run of the place. She was known among us travelers as "Mama". Nobody knew how she came to have such a name.

All that they had to offer was cheese sandwiches on white sliced bread. Of this, they had an ample supply, plus tea.

I had two sandwiches for which I was charged thirty cents apiece. The two high road workers had the same, and we went back to the plough. When we arrived, a pay-loader was already at work. Not surprisingly, as this road was the only one leading to and from the Burin Peninsula.

Even the pay loader had a hard time to clear the road, as he had to scoop up each shovel full of snow and dump it over the top of the snow banks. At least he was making progress.

At noon we all drove back to the little restaurant. The menu; cheese sandwiches. This time I paid forty cents a piece. At four in the afternoon, the pay loader finally got to my truck. It took him an hour to make room for my truck, so I could get aside for the loader to pass and go on with his work.

It was suppertime and I drove my truck to the restaurant so I could gas up. This time, I paid fifty cents a sandwich. As the plough driver was going to work all night, I decided to follow him. But from my experience of the last two days, I ordered half a dozen sandwiches for the road. Lo and behold I just paid fifty cents for the one I just ate, and now I am asked sixty. I paid and left right behind the department of high-roads truck.

The pay loader worked for a couple more hours before breaking through to higher grounds, where the snow on the road was not too deep and the snowplough took over. I followed him to the Terrenceville branch, where the plough turned left to Terrenceville and I and a couple dozen other vehicles turned right toward Swift Current and toward home.

Arriving home on Tuesday mid morning I found that my friend Philip Auerbach, whom I saw last in Marystown on Friday night and who left to get to that little restaurant thirty miles closer to home, decided that night to continue and got to St. John's Saturday morning, saving himself all the hardship I went through.

Fortunately, Ruth did not know where I was, giving me more credit than I deserve, assuming that I am in the little boarding house in Marystown where Philip Auerbach saw me Friday night.

I did not set out here to write about Newfoundland topography, nor about the conditions of its roads in those years. One could not imagine them now. They have been straightened, levelled and above all, diverted to go around hills or mountains instead of over them. Just to keep their memory alive, I will mention the names of a few in eastern Newfoundland and Burin peninsula; Chapel-Arm's-Hill, Swift Current-Hill, Bay-L'argent-Hill, Rushoon Hill, Bonavista Bay South, Summerville-Hill, Bonavista North, East-Port-Road Hills, Indian-Bay, Old Gingle. All this and many more, which I did not mention would in many places be called mountains and not hills. They have ingrained themselves in my memory for I drove over them countless times, and all of them gave me unforgettable problems.

Still, despite all the hardships that I encountered on those road, despite the rawness and inhospitable terrain, the raggedness of its shores and the harshness of its climate, the people as human beings, by far made up for all those short-comings.

I hope that in the coming pages I will have the opportunity to point out some of their unforgettable qualities.

The spring of 1959 arrived and the weather had another surprise in store for Newfoundland. Just as the winter had an unusual amount of precipitation, so with the arrival of spring, which is as a rule, end of May and brings with it fog that stays to the end of June. This time however, there was no fog and all the precipitation from the winter dried up by the end of May. By the end of June the countless smaller ponds and lakes were dry. The forests, on which Newfoundlanders depend so much, were cinder dry and crying out for rain but to no avail.

Sometime between the end of June and the beginning of July, fires started in some of the forest. The reason was never discovered. There were three assumptions. One, by lightning. Secondly, by carelessness, either by campers or smokers. The last reason, someone deliberately set the fires. During those two months, July and August, most of the forests of eastern Newfoundland burned down. The only forest that was spared that conflagration was the woods of Terra Nova Park, which has the nicest scenery in the eastern part of the island and is home to every species of plant and animal life in Newfoundland including the moose and black bear.

The fire was not confined to the eastern part of the island. It burned most of the woods on the Burin Peninsula too. That summer, I got caught almost on the very same spot as in March's snowstorm. However, this time it was behind a wall of fire. I was on my way home, when the mounted police closed the road between Don River and Swift Current. We spent the night in

the vehicles and the following morning a police car tried to lead us through. The closer we got to Swift Current the thicker the smoke got and the more cinders kept falling on us. The smoke got so thick that we could hardly see the vehicle in front of us with the light on. I was concerned about my truck, as the box was made of wood and plywood. The roof was almost flat, with a slant for water to run off, but not enough for cinders to fall off.

I guess I was not the only one to be worried. The many trucks ahead of me and behind were just as much in danger. The burning trees on either side of the road did not give much encouragement either.

The police car leading the column of cars and trucks, of which there could have been close to a hundred, decided that it was too dangerous to continue and ordered us back. It was not as simple as that for a hundred vehicles to turn around in the thick and choking smoke and burning trees on either side of the road. We did however and got back to the river where we had to spend another twenty-four hours.

It is fair to admit that it was not as bad as when I got stuck there six months earlier in the snow. I was not suffering from cold. I was not stuck. So I could go back to the settlements I just cam from. I was not alone and I was not hungry. For from my winter experience, I started carrying canned and dry food with me as well as drinks for "just in case."

The next evening we were permitted to go on. We drove through what was just two days ago a standing forest and now it was only smouldering cinders. Granted, Newfoundland evergreens are not prize-winning trees, but this is what there was and were content with it.

In the early years of Confederation with Canada, that is from 1949 to the mid sixties, many settlements became accessible by road. Before it they were accessible by sea only. Those roads built over all kinds of terrain and were susceptible to the weather. At times a lasting rain could dissolve them into the ground or change them into swamp.

However, those roads held a lure for us salesmen, for at the end of it was a settlement in which there were stores, and the stores meant sales. Before those settlements were connected by a road, the only way for a store keeper to reorder his supplies was to go by board to St. John's, which entailed quite an effort. The bringing the merchandise to their door was a great help to them and they were glad to see us. Of course that welcome carpet did not last too long. The storekeepers soon realized that there is beginning to form a line of salesmen and each anxious to sell and that there is no danger of running out of suppliers. So they began to cut down on their purchases. The trick or the

ambition of each salesman was to get to settlements behind the newly opened road before any of his competitors do , or at least to be one of the first ones.

So the news of a new road opening was kept secret from one another among salesmen for as long as possible. The chance of a good sale was to be the first one. I like to take the credit for being the first salesman of dry goods that travelled the piece of road between Bunyan's Cove and Port Blandford. Grocery trucks started going there day's before me.

The same would apply to opening the road between Trinity Bonavista Bay North to Wesleyville. I had in those days a customer in Trinity B.B. by the name of Phil Brown. A nice elderly man who was also known for having the biggest house in the place.

I got there with the first snow fall in 1959. Mr. Brown informed me that the road to Wesleyville is open but very soft. Seeing my hesitation in travelling thirty miles on a newly built road, he offered to come with me and take along his grandson Sam, a teenager.

I stayed overnight in Trinity B.B. as I usually did and in the morning we set out. The snow melted and changed the road into a sea of mud. It took us two hours to cover the road in one direction, and three on the way back, for I stopped to get another truck out of the mud.

In the early sixties, the federal governments in partnership with the provincial began to build a cross island highway, beginning from the very south western point of the island where the C.N. ferry that commutes between the mainland of Canada to the closest point of the island docked. It's a place called "Channel" or "Port-Aux-Basques". It went from there to the very eastern point and provincial capital, St. John's. No small undertaking but an absolute necessity. It would connect the most eastern and western part of the island, which until now it was only connected by a narrow gage railway line. It was a very unreliable means of transportation in winter.

The first year they paved thirty miles of road starting from St. John's. What a difference it was in comparison with the old road. We, and when I say we, I mean to say every Newfoundlander, could not wait to see the road completed.

This road was being built from the bottom up, where needed. The turf was moved away to lay bare the solid rock bottom, on which small and large boulders were dumped , which came from the solid rock hills that were being blasted away to make room for the new modern road.

That road was to be part and the last leg of the Trans Canada Highway, connecting Vancouver on the west coast of Canada with St. John's in the east.

Along the new highway being built, signs appeared praising the glory and generosity of the present day governments, both Federal and Provincial, and with large letters proclaiming; "We will finish the drive in sixty-five."

Those were memorable and good years for Newfoundland. Years when the first premier of the province, the only then living father of Confederation tried hard to drag Newfoundland into the 20th century.

Here I like to share with the readers a personal experience of that time, to enhance the above statement: It happened on the very stretch of road described a couple pagers earlier, but a few years later, namely on the Burin Peninsula, Terrenceville road stretch. A man from Terrenceville built a small restaurant on that road in the middle of nowhere at the corner where the road to Terrenceville branches off the main Burin road. That particular winter, I along with another dozen vehicles got stuck there unable to continue, due to the heavy snowdrifts. We had to spend the night there, but there was not enough accommodation for all the travellers. Some had to stretch out on the floor and some spent the night on chairs. I was one of the fortunate ones to be given a single bed to share with a total stranger. The room was cold, in fact the whole house was cold, like most houses in the out-ports in those days. Therefore there was no thought of getting undressed. The man, a known fish processor in St. John's, got into the bed fully dressed. I followed suit. The bed was old and the springs stretched with no elasticity left. The man fell into the middle of it, and due to his over two hundred pounds weight, my weight could not level out the springs. I would have to lie half on top of him if I am to lie relaxed. I turned on my side away from him, positioning myself on the edge or frame of the bed. Supporting my head with one arm, I held myself in that position all night. Of course there was no thought of sleep.

I remember thinking of a movie I saw some time earlier, by the name of "Moby Dick." It portrayed the life of whalers in Britain in the middle of the nineteen century. There in the movie presents itself a moment when two total strangers have to share one bed. In the movie at least, it was a double bed, and they could lie comfortably. Here I am in the second half of the twentieth century confronted by a same situation.

I mentioned the above event to portray to the reader a lifestyle that existed in the out-ports of Newfoundland in the middle of the twentieth century which the premier and government of Newfoundland tried hard to change.

The road building was only one aspect of the changing face of Newfoundland. The second major change was the spanning of electrical wires across the island. Electricity that introduced refrigerators, televisions,

washing machines and many more electrical appliances, unknown until then in the out-ports.

Those were good days for Newfoundland in its main industry, fishing. The introduction of draggers which increased the catch and brought about the building of modern fish plants and employment for up until now many unemployed people.

We, too settled down to a routine. Our son Kenneth (Itzchak Yaakov Kopel) was a good student, in which Ruth and I took much pride. Our two daughters, Sharon (Esther Sheva) and Aviva (Chayah Sarah) stayed home with Ruth and I changed my routine by leaving home Sunday evening and returning Friday.

At that time the Jewish community had an old Shul (Synagogue) on Henry Street. As the community was growing due to the influx of a dozen or so new members, mostly survivors of the Holocaust and the old members and their children, who became more prosperous during, and after the war, the leadership proposed and was accepted by the members, to build a new Shul. (Synagogue.)

Committees were formed to raise money. A piece of land was bought on Elizabeth Avenue for a building and parking lot and soon after the construction began.

In summer 1959, Ruth's parents Penny (Pinchus) and Dora (Deborah) Pleet came to visit us. This became a yearly tradition.

The members of the Jewish community were busy raising money. While the men were writing cheques, the women were coming up with all kinds of projects. There were rummage sales, bake sales, card games, bingos, dinner parties, lotteries and others.

Before we knew it, it was spring 1960. The new Shul (Synagogue) was finished and the community was humming with activity. The day of the dedication was drawing near. Equally so was the tenth anniversary of our wedding, which is June 14th.

By a fluke of fate, the executive of the community decided on a Saturday and the next day Sunday, the thirteenth and fourteenth of June as the two days for the dedication.

It was to be an affair to remember, worthy of the occasion. For indeed the struggling Jewish community of St. John's had survived to see its membership outgrow the old wooden Shul on Henry Street, into a beautiful stone edifice, worthy of a much larger congregation. In reality the membership of our congregation a that time was the highest in its history,

reaching sixty eight members, which has never been as high before and I am sad to say, never since.

The Friday night's services before the dedication was conducted by Rabbi Kotziner (may he rest in peace) who was filling in the position of Rabbi, Torah reader, blower of the ram's horn, teacher, procurer of Kosher food and other functions required in a Jewish community.
In fact, our son Kenneth (Itzchak Yaakov Kopel) started that year to attend the first year Hebrew school, so called Sunday school, which in reality meant three times a week, twice besides Sunday.

Rabbi Kotziner was endowed with a pleasant voice and would not be embarrassed in front of a group of accredited cantors. He conducted the service very much according to our traditional orthodox way, which was the tradition of our congregation since its conception.

Present at Friday nights services for the dedication of the new synagogue were; Rabbi S. Zambrowsky, who held the office of chief Rabbi of the city of Montreal, and was representing the Rabbinical Association of Canada. He was elected some time later as president of World Mizrachi and giving up his rabbinical position in Montreal, he moved with his wife, Belle, to Israel. We are related to the Zambrowskys, but neither they nor we have figured it out exactly. The second guest was the first secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Canada, who represented the Israeli Government.

The following morning, Saturday, the day of dedication, which because of the Sabbath was extended to the next day, Sunday, the synagogue was full to over flow with dignitaries, besides the entire community, men, women and children.

Lead by the premier of Newfoundland, Mr. J. R. Smallwood was his entire cabinet, the clergy of every religious denomination, the mayor of St. John's and many of his councilmen, representatives of every organization. In a word, everybody who was anybody.

After the service, there were speeches beginning with the president of the community. Followed by the premier and others. After the speeches a reception for the community and guests.

At night there was a dinner for the entire community.

The next day the dedication took place at which all the distinguished guests of the previous day were present. Again there was a reception for all the guests and the community, at which time we rubbed shoulders with all the dignitaries.

That, as I mentioned took place on Sunday, the fourteenth of June. I recall saying to Ruth, as we were leaving that affair, "what a beautiful way to celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary".

I must admit now in all honesty, that of all our anniversaries I remember our tenth the best.

Since the end of the war, the St. John's Jewish community was beginning to experience a problem with getting rabbis, or spiritual leaders as they were often called, for not all were accredited or ordained rabbis.

As the economic situation and with it the standard of living during and after the war had improved in North America, so has the situation of the Jewish communities. At the same time a major source of rabbis and Hebrew teachers dried up, namely European Jewry which was almost completely destroyed under Nazi rule. The demand for rabbis grew in North America. There were not many rabbis or Hebrew teachers willing to leave larger Jewish centres on the main land and move to a far away place like St. John's, Newfoundland that was six hundred miles from the nearest Jewish community. Not to mention the isolation of the island and its inhospitable climate. Neither could the community tempt any body with generous remuneration, because of its size and substantial expenses in upkeep of the synagogue. So we had to do at times with less accredited rabbis and settle for Hebrew teachers who were not as versed in the Talmud as a rabbi.

As long as they could teach the children Hebrew and conduct religious services on Sabbath and holidays. In a pinch, some of our congregants could help out with conducting the services. Here I would like to mention three such people that come to mind who have helped out in such situations throughout my time in Newfoundland. One was Morris Wilansky who hailed from around Minsk in Belarussia and came with his parents, brothers and sisters, to Newfoundland as a teenager but who acquired a good knowledge of Jewish religious education in his early years by attending a Yeshiva (an institute of higher Talmudic learning) in Pruzany before leaving for Newfoundland. By the way, his father was the first and only Shoykhet (a Jewish ritual slaughterer) in Newfoundland's history who used to slaughter chickens according to Jewish law for the community in St. John's.

While I am at it I would like to mention that Morris Wilansky's son, Graham, who was born in St. John's went in his father's footsteps, by besides acquiring a good formal education, he also attended a Yeshiva in New York where he became well versed in Jewish tradition and used to help out with the services in our synagogue. Unfortunately he passed away at an early age, leaving a wife and three young children.

The second was Lewis (Leibel) Ferman, a survivor of the Holocaust, who survived with his wife in a partisan group under the leadership of Tevie Bielsky. A decorated resistant fighter and above all a committed Jew to its tradition and survival. It was Mr. Ferman who organized the yearly Remembrance services, in memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which at the same time was dedicated as an evening to commemorate the Holocaust. It used to be a well-organized affair at which distinguished Newfoundland personalities used to address the gathering, which was open to the public. I must say that at many such affairs the synagogue hall was full to capacity.

Besides the above-mentioned activity, Mr. Ferman used to conduct often services in the synagogue. Those who knew him well will remember him for his magnanimous nature and benevolence.

Unfortunately, Mr. Ferman died shortly after moving to Toronto in 1989.

A third person who helped out a lot in conducting services was Ernest Mauskopf. A survivor of the Holocaust, he was not only the "Baal-Thefillah" but also the "Baal-Krie" (reader of the Torah) for many many years.

Others helped out too, according to their ability amongst them me.

There was a short period when the community was without a spiritual leader for some six months. It happened in 1957 and I volunteered to teach the children for those six months once a week whenever I was in town. We then got a teacher from Israel by the name of Eisenberg who came with a wife and two boys, ages four and six. They stayed for close to two years and moved to Calgary.

We got a young couple, Hungarian Jews that came via Israel by the name of Fishlovitz. At that time I became a member of the executive and given the portfolio of education. A function I held for thirty years in the Newfoundland Jewish community until our departure.

I do not know for sure the reason, but despite the fact that executives were changing every couple of years in those days, I was always handed the education portfolio even if the slate of officers of which I was a member did not get elected. Is it because I did such a good job? I doubt it. It is most likely that I was the only "Learned Jew" as we used to say in Europe. In my part of the world, meaning; I knew Hebrew.

For this I am thankful to my parents who put so much emphasis on my education, and my father's constant reprimanding me for running with the boys instead of reading, which resulted in me sitting over books for many hours, envious of my friends who were playing ball outside.

However, this sitting over books resulted in me having a good command of Hebrew, even in comparison with native Israelis.

It was after the teacher Fishlovitz, that Rabbi Kutziner came to St. John's and remained up to 1962, when he left for the Maritimes and it was our good fortune to have had him, because of his qualifications as a Rabbi, his voice as a cantor and his traditional eastern European approach to the Rabbinate.

Those were also the most active and productive year of the community. After the completion of the synagogue, the community was left with a substantial mortgage. True, a large part of the building funds was raised by outright contributions of the members and the sale of the old synagogue on Henry Street. Still, all of it covered barely half of the building's cost.

The community set out to raise extra money above the needed to pay up the morgage. It was needed for the upkeep of the synagogue and Rabbi.

A committee to find ways was formed and was appropriately named "ways and mean committee." In this endeavour the women of the Sisterhood excelled the men. They continued to organize bake sales, rummage sales, card games, dinners and other means of raising money.

The Men's and Ladies committee organized dances in the synagogue and even card games open to the public. The ladies of the community were busy and to a large extent the men, too. One could feel the heart beat, the pulsation of an active and vibrate Jewish community in a faraway, and at that time, isolated place.

In summer 1961 our daughter Sharon (Esther Sheva) started kindergarten in the Harrington School on Lemarchant Road. As I was most of the days away from home, Ruth used to take both children, the five year old Sharon and the three year old, Aviva on the bus to kindergarten and return home with the younger one Aviva. The same was in the afternoon when Sharon had to come home. Ruth had to take the younger one with her to pick up the older one.

Understandably it was hard on Ruth, besides the wasting of so much time on busses. She decided to let the five year old Sharon go by herself. The trip entailed changing busses at Rawland Cross.

Ruth went with her a couple of times, giving Sharon the bus ticket and pretending that she was not there. Sharon went along with this game and after a few tries, Ruth let her go by herself. A feat for a five-year-old but it also attests to the peace and tranquility in which a capital of a province lived in those days. A mother could let a five-year-old child go alone to school, travelling on busses and having even to change busses on the way.

Sharon finished kindergarten there and continued for the next two years in grade one and two. When it came time to enrol in grade three, Ruth decided to enrol her in St. Andrew's School, which was no more than two hundred

meters from our house. There was a problem however. The Newfoundland School Board was administrated by the assorted religious order. That is to say that up to now the schools are administrated and belong to individual religious denominations. As there were no Jewish schools, the Jewish kids were accepted in all other school, but had to continue going to the same in which they started.

The St. Andrew School did not belong to the same Protestant denomination as the Harrington School and when on the first day of school, Ruth brought Sharon to the principal with the request to accept her into the St. Andrew School, he asked her what religious denomination she belonged to. Hearing that she was Jewish, and knowing that there is no Jewish school, he said that she has to continue with the same religious denomination that she started.

Ruth kept asking him to accept her, as we lived no more than a two to three minute walk from St Andrew school and to go to the one she started entailed a ride with two busses. He gave in. Taking Sharon by the hand, he led her to a class while Ruth followed them. In the classroom he introduced Sharon to her teacher whose face shoved disapproval. Understandably, for what teacher wants an extra pupil over the prescribed thirty she already had. But she had to accept her as the principal, Mr. Brown directed.

Sharon proved herself to be an excellent pupil throughout all her school years, receiving yearly recognition and awards. The same as her brother, who meantime in 1959 was transferred from Harrington to Holloway School, where he studied until 1964 and from there transferred to Macpherson Junior High up to 1966.

When Sharon started in 1963-second grade in Harrington, Aviva was enrolled there into kindergarten and the two of them were travelling by bus together. Sharon was now seven years old and was taking care of her five-year-old sister.

A year later in fall of 1964 when Sharon was accepted to third grade in St. Andrew's School, Aviva started grade one there as well. Each of the girls attended that school up to and including grade six.

In 1962 when Rabbi Kutziner left our community, we managed to get Mr. Shein. He was in his mid forties and his wife about the same age. They hailed from Hungary, fairly recently. He seemed to have come from a religious background and his wife the opposite. He did his job conscientiously, correctly but lacked or was unable to instil enthusiasm in others. He was always a gentleman, accommodating and ready to compromise. In questions of Jewish law, at time in my opinion, too much.

They had no children and kept very much to themselves. A bit too much for the liking of the community. But since they were so extremely reserved, so distant from the community, without imposing any demands or requests of any sort, the community or the majority of it was happy to let things be.

Some parents whose children attended his classes disapproved of his methods of bribing his students with chocolate bars if they exceeded their work. It used to stir up jealousy and even animosity among the students.

Coming from a very orthodox Hungarian background, he was never exposed to Zionism. Understandably he could not instil it in his students of which I greatly disapproved.

As I mentioned earlier, the ideal of Zionism and the state of Israel was always on my mind. My dream as a teenager was to go at that time to Palestine, to help rebuild the Jewish homeland. Now that the dream of a Jewish homeland had materialized, I began to dream of a visit there, which at that time, in the early nineteen sixties for me, was unattainable.

In the early sixties there must have been over a dozen young couples of our age, with children of our children's age in the community. A good example would be the boys of our son's, Ken's, age. There were five of them. All born within a period of six months. The oldest being Larry Riteman who was born in May 1952 and the youngest, our son Ken whom was born in October of that year. In between there were three others; Harvey Hershenkopf, Sidney Wilansky and Allan Ferman. They did not attend public school together but the did attend the Hebrew classes so called Sunday classes. The same was applicable for the girls.

The boys, as they got old enough joined the cubs and later the scouts. The girls, their counter-parts.

I did not have much time to spend with our children, being out of town most of the week. Every week even being in town, I was constantly busy, so I tried to play games with the children while working.

Sunday was the day I was loading the truck. Having converted the garage into a warehouse, I used to back up the truck to the garage door with its door in the back open, thus having the truck covering the entire garage door from the outside. This gave me complete privacy and easy access from the warehouse to the inside of the truck. This way I could load up the truck out of sight of inquisitive eyes.

It was then that the kids, in their preschool or early school years, used to come down to the basement, which served as a warehouse too. From the basement a door led to the garage and they would try to help me load.

One can imagine that loading a truck with dry good merchandize, where every item had to be marked and every dozen had to be assorted into size and colours and wrapped or tied individually and then place in its assigned place. A four or six year old, or even a ten-year-old is not much help. But I kept them entertained and happy by playing games with them.

The most favourite that never failed was hide and seek. Two of them had to go into the garage while I used to hide the third child in a box of clothes in the basement. After hiding, the other two children had to find the hidden one. I can see now the joy in their eyes or hear their delighted voices after having found the hidden one.

On those Sunday mornings, Ruth used to surprise me with one of her specialties. The most favoured by all was her chocolate cheese cake, still warm from the oven, which she used to bring down or call up one of the children to take it downstairs for me and the children.

A couple times a year, in winter, I used to get some firewood ready plus a tin can, Kosher hot dogs, mustard, buns and matches and we used to drive out some twenty miles out of town. There, behind the shelter of a wall from an old abandoned water reservoir, we used to get a bonfire started, suspending the tin can filled with hot dogs in water. After the water used to boil, we ate the hot dogs in buns with mustard.

The kids used to love it and I think that not only I, but they too remember it fondly.

As I mentioned the hot-dogs, I reminded myself of the fact that we, actually Ruth for she used to be the one to make the phone calls to the members of the community about ordering delicatessen. It started quite innocently. After being away from Montreal for some years, we, or I began to miss the Kosher Montreal delicatessen. Seeing that we had the connection with "Lewitt Delicatessen" from before, Ruth wrote to ask if they would send us a few items. They did and when we had guests and served the food, their question was: Where did we get it. The following question was if we could order for them too. Before we knew it, we were ordering for half of the community. Such an order had to be sent airfreight. The good part was that we only ordered it once a year, in the fall.

The not so good part was that it was I who had to divide up the order according to everyone's specific requests and even had to deliver it to some of the elderly members. It is interesting to note, that despite my attentiveness in figuring out how much every one owed us, we always came out loosing few dollars and had to put it out of our own pocket.

In the later years when the community started to shrink, we stopped ordering it altogether.

Many of the parents in the St. John's community who had children a little older than our, were sending them to Camp Kadima, some hundred miles from Halifax. This was the only chance Jewish children in St. John's had to meet other Jewish children from away. Here they shared experiences and acquired an understanding of Jewish life in other places across eastern Canada. Above all, in that camp they were introduced to Zionism and to Jewish traditions that some did not get at home. Many of those things were taught and enhanced with the help of Israeli songs and dances that remained in their memory up to and in their adulthood.

The acceptance age to the summer camp in those days was ten years, but we decided to send our son, Kenneth earlier and in the summer of 1962, a few months shy of his tenth birthday, he went. In a group of about half a dozen others.

Two weeks before his departure, we sent out his clothes, which in itself was quite a task. We had to buy a large trunk, a sleeping bag, flannel grey blankets, but the big job was to sew on nametags on everything from hankies to blankets. On dozens of underwear, socks, T-shirts, shorts, swimming trunks, you name it.

Half way through the camp season, I among other parents from St. John's left to see the campers. Arriving in Halifax late in the afternoon, we spent the night there and left in the morning by car, a two-hour ride.

It was visiting day and there were many parents from Halifax and the few surrounding Jewish communities. We were late in coming and as we parked near the gate, I got out of the car expecting to see our son nearby, for according to the instructions we received from the camp directory, the kids would be waiting for us at the gate. In fact there were no kids around. After inquiring in the office, we were directed to go to their cabins. Sure enough, as I approached the cabin, I noticed Kenneth. He noticed me at the same time and began running toward me. I can see his face which expressed so much joy on seeing me and at the same time the hurt he felt for me letting him wait for me while other parents showed up earlier. Those two feelings were so plainly evident on his face and moved me emotionally so much that it made my eyes tears. Of course, so were his as I hugged him. How could I explain to him that it was not my fault at all. That I was getting a ride from a former Newfoundlanders who took a carload of us to the camp and on the way, a mother who was travelling with her five year old daughter who got car

sick, decided to stop at a farm to rinse her daughter's little dress. It would not have been proper to be seen like this by her twelve-year-old brother.

If the meeting was tearful, the parting was worse, but at least I had lots of company for all the campers came to the gate to say good bye to their parents. Judging by the tears, one would think that the parting was forever.

Even now, I am not so sure if visiting day in camp is such a good idea.

The following year, 1963, Ruth went on visiting day. The next year, I went. This time, however, it was much better. Ken was already a seasoned camper and the hellos and good byes were more restrained.

Through all the years, since I came to Canada I walked around with a guilty feeling, a sense of betrayal. The betrayal of my childhood dreams and aspirations. The betrayal of my fervent wish during the Nazi nightmare, namely that if I have to die, why can't I die for a Jewish home in at that time Palestine, instead of perishing namelessly among millions of others, without a name or without anybody ever knowing I existed. The gnawing feeling was enhanced by my awareness that I left Italy for Canada, at a time when the newly reborn infant state, Israel, was fighting for its very first breath of air. When five Arab armies had attacked her in order to snuff its life out before its persecuted people, many survivors of the Holocaust, knew the taste of freedom and independence.

Now that Israel was independent, it had not known a day of peace since its conception, for its Arab neighbours kept on sending gangs of murderers across its borders who used to, under cover of darkness, attack individual vehicles on isolated roads. Or place bombs under waters pipes, or electrical transmissions or in general terrorize distant Jewish settlements. My longing for that little corner of the world, the realizing of a two thousand year old dream of my people, was beckoning to me from afar, as if to say; Come. Take a look at me. You dreamed about me so much. The least you can do is to walk on my soil so soaked with the blood of your forefathers of old and with the blood of your brethren of late, who gave their lives so that you and others like you, my children, can walk in the streets of my cities. In the fields of my valleys, and the rocky hills of Judea and Samaria you can walk. Inhale the fragrant air of my mountains and feast your eyes on my beloved city, Jerusalem.

I spoke to Ruth often about my dream of visiting Israel. But how could I afford it. The years began to roll by and I was unable to put aside a few dollars.

My other dream was to do something in memory of my parents who perished with the rest of my family and after whom there was no mention or

marker anywhere, never mind a grave stone. I had mentioned it to Ruth too but that was as far as it went.

In 1964 Kenneth was enrolled in Macpherson Junior High School. At the same time, Sharon entered grade three in St. Andrew's School and Aviva entered the same school in grade one.

For the Jewish boys of Ken's age, the time was approaching to became Bar Mitzvah, a time when a Jewish boy turns thirteen and assumes his own religious responsibilities.

Traditionally, when the boy's thirteenth birthday used to come around, he used to be honoured with an "Aliyah" or with "Mafter", in the synagogue. That is to read a portion of the Torah for that particular week.

In the affluent countries, in the post World War II years, particularly in the U.S.A. it developed into a show off affair where parents and grandparents are trying to out-do their friends by throwing more ostentatious parties. It also caught on in Canada. In St. John's, being away from Jewish centres, the competition was not as great, but it was also the first time in that community that six Bar Mitzvahs came up in the short time of six months, an unprecedented event in its history and never to be repeated again so far.

As our son Kenneth was the youngest of the group, we had time to come. to our own conclusions. Those affairs markedly differed one from another. While one consisted of just a Kiddush on Saturday after services, the most ostentatious was a dinner, music and dancing on a Saturday night.

we came to the decision to take our son on a trip to Israel. By it, accomplishing two aspirations. One to let him see with his own eyes the land of his forefathers, by instilling in him a sense of belonging and the ongoing connection between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. The second was to fulfill my own life long dream to see that land with my own eyes.

Taking in consideration all the expenses, we came to the conclusion that the trip for the three of us, that is for Ruth, our son and myself would not exceed the expense of an evening of dinner and music, even for our small community. It would be of much more benefit to our son, who is after all the main subject of the whole affair.

In the fifties and in the sixties, the fishing on the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland was very rewarding and it attracted mainly fishing boats from across the Atlantic. Next to the traditional boats that fished there from Spain and Portugal, others began to fish too. The largest in size and quantity were the Soviet fishing boats, followed by the Polish, Japanese, German (both east and west) and other in small numbers.

Those boats used to come into the St. John's harbour for supplies, mainly fuel, fresh water and fresh vegetables. Besides for supplies they used to come in for emergencies. Particularly the Soviet and Polish boats who used to spend as much as six months at a time off the shores of Newfoundland.

As there were more than a hundred Soviet boats around, it was inevitable that some one would take sick or get hurt in an accident. Then his boats had to take that person in for treatment in St. John's for the medical care aboard the ships were poor.

With so many foreign boats in port and at times hundreds of sailors on the streets, it is not surprising that the local population got used to seeing them and stopped paying attention to them

I did however pay particular attention to the Soviet boats, hoping to meet a Jewish sailor. A big help in this endeavour was my friend Lewis (Leibl) Ferman, who besides having a dry goods store on Water Street, was also a part time employee of the St. John's dry dock, owned and operated by the government. It was he who used to serve as a translator for the dry dock when Soviet or Polish boats used to come in for repairs or when a sick Soviet or Polish sailor used to be brought in to the hospital for medical attention.

It was this job that gave him the opportunity to get on those boats and even see the list of names of the crew. Glancing through them, he used to look for Jewish sounding names. Even finding them was only the beginning, for no individual was permitted to be alone with a foreigner. The only way to get them off the boat was to offer a group of them a ride to see the town and take along the Jewish man.

During those years, I had succeeded in meeting even a couple of Jewish captains, but they were even more careful than the non-Jews. Even inviting them home, they would not go by themselves, always with a couple of companions. Still I kept on looking for a Jewish face in a crowd of foreign fishermen as I was passing them on the streets or in a store.

On a late Saturday morning, in early March 1965, I found myself with Ruth and our youngest child, Aviva who was then six years old, in Woolworth's department store on Water Street. The street which was the main business street in downtown St. John's, ran parallel to the principal docking wharf for most of the foreign fishing boats, giving the crew of the boats easy access to the city's shopping facilities. Therefore, it was no wonder to see at times literally hundreds of foreign fishermen on Water Street and in the stores as they were easily recognized by their attire.

We were just about ready to leave the store as a group of foreign fishermen passed by in front of us. More as habit than anything else, I looked at them

assessing their nationality which I rightly determined to be Polish. One face caught my eye. It was strangely familiar. It belonged to a man in his mid fifties, who must have been tall once, but now slightly bent over. He was wearing a beret on his head and a long grey coat that was in fashion before the war and was still in fashion in Eastern Europe after the war.

Where have I seen this face before? I stood there for a moment thinking. The face triggered a memory in my mind, but it could not be or could it? Could it be the face of Leon Kulowski? The man I attribute with saving my life in Auschwitz by taking me away from the penal colony and getting me the job in the carpenter shop?

I stood there glued to the floor, not knowing what to do. I wrote to him from Italy's displaced persons camp several times after liberation, but to no avail. Should I go over and ask him and make a fool out of myself? But what if it is him.....

I hear Ruth's voice asking me what I am looking at. Do you see that man in the black beret and dark grey coat? I ask her. Yes, said Ruth. What about him? His face looks familiar to me, I tell her. It reminds me of Leon. You are crazy, Ruth answered. I knew it sounded crazy. Yet, I couldn't go away. Well, said Ruth, come on, it is lunchtime. But what if it is Leon? I ask. O.K. O.K. said Ruth, go and ask him if it will make you feel better and we will go home.

I walked over to the group of Polish fishermen. Facing that man in the dark grey coat, I addressed him in Polish;

Are you Polish?

Yes, he answered.

Have you ever been to Auschwitz?

The man looked at me inquisitively, slowly nodding his head, he says: Yes.

I feel immediately that I got the right man and can feel the tension rising in my stomach. I say to him: Is your name Leon Kulowski, Auschwitz number 805?

His mouth dropped, his eyes open wide. He can barely blurt out: Who are you?

I can hardly control myself. Shivering with excitement, I am trying in one minute to tell him who I am and what he did for me.

He does not remember a thing. I take him over to where Ruth and Aviva are. Ruth knows all about him. What follows is like a dream. We take him home. The story spreads in minutes over the town. There are people from

the television, reporters from the newspapers. Friends call to congratulate me on such an event.

At about supper, I finally stopped shaking. It turns out that it is his fifth visit to St. John's. He is now the ship's physician . After the war and liberation, he went back to university and became a doctor. As fishermen and fishing crews make much more money aboard ships than doctors or university professors on land in communist Poland, and having to support a wife and two children, he decided to join the ships crew and go to sea as a ship's doctor.

This story spreads across his ship immediately too and when I took him back late in the evening, the entire crew was on deck looking at me with curiousity.

In those days there was a chronic shortage of everything in the communist countries and I gave him whatever he dared to take in clothing and footwear. He would not take money, for if he would get caught, he would have spent the rest of his life in jail.

Even the cloths and footwear we had to smuggle aboard, unnoticed by the crew, for if anyone of the crew would had seen, there was no doubt in Leon's mind that they would inform the officials upon arrival in the home port. Either because so many of them were informers or out of sheer jealousy. So Ruth and I took the stuff under our coats the following day and went with him aboard where we deposited it in his own small cabin. I will add that we had to make a couple of trips in order not to look too suspicious with all the clothing under our coats.

After two days stay in St. John's, his boat left for home, which meant the Polish port town of Gdynia.

Their plan was to be back to continue fishing on the rich fishing grounds off Newfoundland's Grand Banks. Normally after spending a month or so on the fishing grounds, those Polish or Russian boats would come into St. John's for supplies and I was looking forward to seeing Leon again. The three months passed. His boat came into St. John's but there was no Dr. Leon Kulowsky aboard and no one on the boat could tell me why.

A short time later, I received a letter from him telling me in a very unclear, ambiguous way that he could not make the trip with his boat this time nor did he say if he will be on it the next time. It did occur to me that it might have to do with me meeting him. But how would I know unless to ask him in a letter which would in all probability be opened by the Polish government censor and if they found it too inquisitive, it would be either destroyed or filed in

his personal folder of the secret police files as they did with so many of my later letters to him.

Some six months after Leon's return to Poland, I received a letter from him informing me that he was assigned another boat and is due in St. John's in a couple of months.

Through the spring of 1965, we were making our preparations for a trip to Israel. We were advised to go with a group for two major reasons. Firstly, it is much cheaper and secondly, and the more important reason is the convenience and expertise of the guides. After much searching, Ruth found a group organized by the J.N.F. The trip was to last three weeks from the later part of July to the middle of August, with a three-day stopover in Paris.

In the previous few years, I have expressed my wish to Ruth to put up some lasting memorial to perpetuate the memory of my parents. Being unable to afford it, I finally put the idea on the back burner. But Ruth did not forget it and a couple of weeks before our departure to Israel, she came up with an idea to plant a grove of trees, a thousand trees in memory of my parents. I had no concept of how much money it entails, but Ruth knew for she had been in touch with the J.N.F.(Jewish National Fund) to inquire about such a project.

I called J.N.F.'s head office and was told that at two dollars a tree, it comes to two thousand dollars, which scared me right away. They went on to say that I do not have to pay the full amount at once and that I can pay in instalments. We arranged it to be paid out in a period of ten years at two hundred dollars a year.

The departure point was Montreal. Arriving a few days earlier with the children, we stayed at Ruth's parents. A day or two before departure, we were introduced to the rest of the small group that consisted of eleven people including us three. The man in charge of the group was the well known Montreal lawyer and Jewish activist, Maxwell Swartz, who in his retirement years made Aliya (moved to Israel), where he continued with the sacred work of helping to build a secure Israel.

I will say that it turned out to be a congenial group of people, which made our trip so much more enjoyable. Our group leader kept on telling us on the way over to try and see all we can, for the first trip is the most memorable, the most noteworthy. How right he was for after all the trips we made afterwards, none remained as vivid in my memory as the first one.

Even though I did not know it them, our trip was a luxurious one. We checked in the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv, which is even now one of the prestigious hotels there. We stayed in the Dan Carmel in Haifa and in the

King David in Jerusalem. We even flew to Eilat for a day where the temperature reached more than one hundred and thirteen degrees in the shade. I recall going in the Red Sea for a swim where the water was the temperature of bathtub water. Coming out, I expected the breeze to cool me off, instead it hit me like the blast from a furnace.

As a group we had to our disposition two large cars, whose drivers were also qualified tour guides. One by the name of Waxman, the other Carmel. With them I had the opportunity not only to show of my knowledge of Hebrew and the history of Zionism but also my familiarity though theoretical, with the geography of Israel and the intimacy of many of the settlements history. For this I own my gratitude to my teacher of the Hebrew school, Yohel Waldshan.

I am lacking words to describe my feelings walking the streets of Tel Aviv or better yet, the streets of Jerusalem even a divided one. To hear Hebrew spoken in the street, to walk in the narrow streets of Meyah Shearim, to listen to the voices of little boys reading the Torah and vocalizing the meaning and commentaries in Yiddish, something that stopped in my shtetl, Shershev when I was a child. Looking with longing from the top of the roof in the direction of the Western Wall without even being able to see it. A thousand major and minor attractions that gladdened my heart, which seemed to pass unnoticed in the following visits.

Another major event was the meeting of some of my relatives, who were fortunate enough to have left Poland before the war and thus saved their lives. Among them was my mother's first cousin Shaine Rochel who left Pruzany in the mid thirties with her husband and two small children. My father's first cousin, Chaim Shemesh who left Shershev in the beginning of the thirties and was joined by this girl friend Sonia Pinsky, who left Shershev in the mid thirties and they got married shortly after. When we met them in Netanyah, they had already a married daughter and a single teenage younger daughter.

They were the only family I had besides my mother's two brothers and their families in New York. Sadly, my mother's two brothers were already gone at the time we were visiting Israel.

But there was somebody else I desperately wanted to see in Israel. It was my very close friend Leibel Bliskowsky, whom I met in my shtube (room) number four in block (building) number eighteen in Auschwitz. The one who used to supply me with soap for washing my superior's underwear. The one with whom I spent nine months in Sosnowitz, the affiliated camp of Auschwitz. The one I lost contact with after the infamous march from

Auschwitz to Mauthausen and the very same whom I found a couple weeks after liberation in a refugee camp boiling chicken feet (not legs) in a tin can. He was also the third partner to the room in which the three of us shared for three years in various refugee camps in Italy.

Understandably I was in touch with him throughout all the years we left Italy. I came to Canada and he went to Israel. By then he was married and they had a little girl.

We were spending the Shabbat in Haifa. As I did not have his telephone number, I wrote him that we will be over to see them Friday night. By the time we finished the Friday night dinner in the hotel with the group, it was past eight o'clock and by the time we got to his house, even by taxi, it was nine. Haifa is a hilly city. To get to his house, I had to walk up a couple dozen stairs. In addition, he lived on the third or forth floor.

I finally got to his door and knocked on it. Not getting any answer, I tried again and again with no response. Disappointed, I went down telling the driver of my failed expectation and frustration. The driver, a young man, thought for a moment and then said; Sir, I am sure that your friend is home and might have gone to sleep. If I were he, I would be very disappointed if a friend of mine would come from Canada and did not waken me. Go up and knock on the door harder. I liked the young man's advice, so I went up and knocked much harder. Sure enough, after a short while there was a commotion behind the door and the door opened. There he was my friend Leibel in his pyjamas. All of his five foot, two inch frame. Behind him stood his wife, even shorter than him in her nightgown.

It turned out that they expected us much earlier and when we did not show up by eight o'clock, they went to bed. One has to keep in mind that I was then forty-two years old and my friend, Leibel was some eighteen-twenty years older than I was. Besides, he was working at Bet-Mam-Bet, a large industrial work shop just out of town, where the work used to begin at six in the morning. His day began at four.

We sat there to the wee hours of the morning. We had a lot of catching up to do. The last time I saw him was him sitting on the Balustrade of the Genua passenger wharf, waving good bye to me as my ship was moving out of the harbour on its way to Halifax, seventeen years earlier.

As Ruth and I got into the taxi on our way back to the hotel, I remarked to Ruth that there is something missing. Something was lost in our friendship, something I did not quite know. Some kind of openness, some kind of frankness which we did not or could not express. I, after all, considered him as the best friend I ever had.

Ruth, having good perception answered quite sensibly that I should not be surprised. Our friendship, that is mine and Leibel's was forged in concentration camp where we had nobody close and everybody reached out to anybody who would reciprocate with a friendly gesture and it remained so in refugee camp. But now you have both built your own lives, not as friends with each other but with your families. With your wives and children and it is to them that you direct your attention, your commitment and your love. How right she was.

During the trip we spent three or four days in Jerusalem in a small hotel called "Ganey Jehuda". Later after an impressive extension, it was renamed "Diplomat." At that time that little hotel was hard on the Jordanian border. The fence of the border was three meters from our window which overlooked an Arab village half a kilometre away which was completely enveloped in darkness at night with not a single light in the street or from a window.

When we visited the same hotel a dozen or so years later, nothing looked the same. The little hotel was no more. In its place stood a modern multi-story "The Diplomat" and the insignificant Arab village was twice or three times its former size. The added new homes were modern, comfortable dwellings, built according to Israeli designs but owned and occupied by Arabs. At night the streets of that prosperous now village, were lit up as bright as any street of Jerusalem if not more and so was every home, judging by the brightly shining windows.

I was thinking to myself; What a difference a few years of introduction to Israeli know-how made to those people and yet what an odd and strange way those people have to show their gratitude, a way so particular, so endemic to them.

We spent a Shabbat in a hotel by the name of "Acadia" in Hertzlia, where at that time among the guests were celebrities like the movie actors George Sanders and Kirk Douglas who were making the movie "Cast a Giant Shadow." It was because of that movie making that the three of us had to make an additional trip from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem as the grove dedication in memory of my parents had to take place in the Martyrs Forest which is in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem. So was the shooting of the movie "Cast a Giant Shadow." In order to proceed with the filming, the road to the Martyrs Forest was closed to all traffic, and we had to postpone the dedication to a later date.

Israel is a hot place in mid summer, which does not cool off even at night except in the mountains. That is why I enjoyed the evenings in Jerusalem when one can use a sweater or jacket at night regardless of how hot it gets during the day. I recall going into a restaurant at five in the afternoon to eat

and escape the heat of the day. When we came out an hour later, I wished I had a jacket. In Tel-Aviv however, there was no escaping from the heat. Ruth and Kenneth did not mind it as much as I did and it is applicable even today.

During the weekend, which consisted of Friday afternoon and Saturday, we utilized the Saturday to go to Benjamina, where I had a "Landsman", a compatriot. It was Gottel Weiner from Shershev some ten years older than I, who was mobilized together with my uncle Eli Kantorowitz in March 1939. They and a couple other young men from Shershev spent three months of German imprisonment as Polish war prisoners after the Polish surrender. Together they returned home in December of the same year to live a year and a half under Bolshevic rule, only to find themselves again under Nazi occupation. For most of them to the end of their young lives, perishing by the hands of the murderous Nazi beasts.

However, Gottel Weiner succeeded in cheating death, surviving Auschwitz where he worked in D.A.W. night shift. The same place where I worked day shift. He married a girl from Pruzany by the name of Sarah after the war and after spending three years in different displaced persons camps in Germany and Italy. After the creation of the state of Israel they made their way there, settling in Benjamina where Gottel had two brothers who left Shershev in the late twenties. I did not remember them from my childhood.

We spent part of the morning and the entire afternoon there. There was no end to the stories each of us had to share and wanted the others to listen. It could have gone on for eternity it seemed.

The same happened on our next visits and with everybody we saw. With my cousin (my father's first cousin) Chaim Shemesh and his wife Sonia, nee Pinsky, Chaim left Shershev in 1932 and she in 1935. Sonia returned to Shershev for a visit in 1939-40 and was fortunate to be permitted by the Bolshevics to go back to the land of Israel in the beginning of 1940.

I recall saying to Chaim Shemesh that my life-time-dream as been fulfilled, namely to see Israel. He replied; do not say fulfilled for once you have seen it, you will not be able to stay away. How right he was!

How beautiful that summer evening was there in Netanyah. The three of us sitting with them on the veranda of their charming little villa, surrounded by blossoming trees, the embodiment of the Israel of my dreams. If, if only, if only that moment could come to the fore again. Could reappear. But again, I have other moments of my life that I wish they could reoccur again. Haven't we all?

The same was applicable to when we came to visit my mother's first cousin, Shaine-Rachel and her family. The warmth of Shaine-Rachel, so endemic to the Auerbachs. It can not be equalled. So reminiscent of my grandmother Freida-Leah, my mother's mother.

Their house already considered old by Israeli standards, was sitting in the middle of a small orchard of citrus trees, but the warm reception more than made up for the inadequacy of the house.

It was by coincidence that they were visited at the same time by their older daughter, Hanna and husband and children who left Israel some half a dozen years earlier and moved to California. There was of course their younger daughter, Ita with her husband Yaakov and their two children who were living nearby in Petah-Tikva.

I was amazed then and more so on our subsequent visits at the phenomenal memory of my mother's first cousin, Sheine-Rachel. She could recall events, names and places dating back to her childhood from the age of two. She died at the age of ninety-two and we saw her a year earlier still in possession of that extraordinary gift, her memory. We were told the she died with her faculties fully functioning and her special gift, her memory, intact.

Ruth and I still recall with fondness the afternoons and evenings spent with her alone after her husband Velvell died. Sitting for hours on end and listening to her stories of my family from half a century before my birth.

How interesting those stories were for me. How engrossed in them we were listening to her. She, Sheina-Rachel, was the last of my parent's generation. Born and raised in Shershev-Pruzany neighbourhood and who knew so thoroughly the history of my mother's side of the family. With her passing, the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century history of that side of the family has become exactly this; History. Never to be told or repeated again.

I should correct it. My cousin, my uncle Shloime (Solomon) Auerbach's oldest son, Jack, has written some of that family's history in his book "The Undying Spark", but nothing to compare with the wealth of information Shaine-Rachel possessed nor with its intricate relations.

On the way back, we stopped over for three days in Paris. The city is every bit as beautiful as they say, but for the people, it leaves a lot to be desired. The impression it made on me coming straight from Israel where I could converse with anybody in Hebrew or Yiddish and if necessary in half a dozen other European languages, where I felt to be among brethern, coreligionist, fellow co-sufferers, and fellow persecuted, where at that time the euphoria due to the rebirth of the state of Israel has not yet evaporated

where I felt that every passer by is not only a friend but a relative, to be suddenly thrust in a big city like Paris, where people do not see you, or at best look at you with indifference. Or to be more honest, you are seen as someone to make a few bucks on. Some of those objectionables we had encountered when we checked in at the hotel that was supposed to be a good one. The following day, the chambermaid did not leave any soap. When I asked her for some, her reply was, "you got some yesterday." At night, we as a group went to the well-known Paris Opera. Our seats were all marked on the tickets. The female usher pointed with the beam of her flashlight to our seats. As soon as we settled down, I felt a tug at my sleeve from behind. I turned around to see the same usher standing behind me with the palm of her hand stretched out in front of my face unceremoniously and quite loudly demanding "Tip". Just one more example. When we were walking on the street, I suggested to Ruth to eat at a side-walk cafe. The place was crowded. The patrons were all locals and the tables small and squeezed together.

We were seated near a French couple, looking at the French menu, unable to decide what to order. Meanwhile, the French couple placed their order, which the waiter brought within a few minutes. What it was I do not remember, but I recall that it looked good. Pointing discreetly at it, I said to the waiter, "La meme chouse," which is one of a half dozen French words I know. The waiter answered in a fairly good English explaining what it was. He marked down the order and disappeared.

When he brought us our order, the French couple, who seemed to be in a hurry, were finishing their meal and the man asked for the bill. I could not help to see the total. Maybe I was a bit too inquisitive.

When we finished and asked for our bill, I recall it was twice as much as that of the French couple. When I asked the waiter this time in English, how come? He suddenly forgot his English and did not understand a word we were saying.

In those three days, there were a few more such incidents with us and our fellow travellers. I promised myself never to return to Paris.

We left Paris less excited than we arrived. I, with a sense of disenchantment. Disillusioned with the people, which I held in such high esteem for so many years.

As soon as we got back home, I had to go out on the road to make a living and to start paying some of my recently incurred debts.

Yet Ruth and I felt that we ought to do something for the community in honour of Ken's Bar Mitzvah, which according to the Jewish calendar is Erev Shmini Atzeret and on the world calendar is on the tenth of October.

We decided on a luncheon after the Shabbat services for the entire community, which at that time was in its pride. Almost seventy families. At such an occasion, everybody used to show up. It was different when it came to attending services.

It was not an easy task to order in all the food from Montreal. I will give all the credit to Ruth. It was she who looked after all the figuring out, the ordering and putting it away. The big deep freezer came in very handy. We, the kosher home keepers, knew how to pack things and how to freeze them.

For this occasion, Ruth's parents came from Montreal and her brother Leonard. That Saturday, after the services, the whole community, old and young alike, adjourned to the synagogue's social hall next to the sanctuary for a lunch fit for kings. Even though the social hall is twice or more the size of the sanctuary, the place was full. I think that it was one of the very rare occasions that the entire community, members and non, showed up in the synagogue. Never the less, it bothered me to see all the food left on the platters, not to mention on the plates.

I know that this is a land of plenty and a lot of food goes to waste. I have attended enough affairs, but until then, I was not involved personally. Since my liberation I looked at food with different eyes, so to speak, with respect and appreciation, with something bordering on reverence. To see someone throw out food is to me a sacrilege. The profanation of the most precious thing in the world next to life itself. I would assume that many other Holocaust survivors feel the same way.

For me it was also a time for reflection, going over the last twenty years since my liberation. Again, despite my loses and hardships, I felt I was building a continuity. Someone to carry on the names, traditions, and memory of my dear ones. A continuity of my cruelly and mercilessly slaughtered family as well as a continuity of my tortured and tormented people. My personal and very own, in a small way, contribution to the prophesy of the "Dry Bones."

Here again, just like during his "Brith-Milah", I was speaking to my parents and grandparents without a sound or moving my lips saying; here, look, he carries your name, your memory, and legacy into another generation. It is within him that you and your memory will go on living.

And so the years began to roll by. Amidst the daily problems, difficulties of making a living and hardships of the road which I have described earlier to a small extent. For good measure, I will mention one more event on the road, which happened to me in spring on the way from Fortune to Lories on the Burin Peninsula.

It is a desolated stretch of road for some thirty kilometres. As it was infrequently used, it was even less looked after. In the spring with the frost coming out of the ground, it used to turn into a sea of mud. Half way between those two places, Fortune and Lories, there was a place called "Dantzic Point". It might have had a couple of houses at some time, but in my days there was no sign of it. On that spot I had to get stuck axel deep in slime. No matter how I tried, the truck would not move. The spinning wheels would just dig themselves in deeper. It occurred to me to put on the snow chains on the wheels and maybe they will get me out of the mud hole like from a snow bank. The idea came easier then putting on the chains. The double wheel chain weighs eighty pounds, but this is only the beginning. The wheel has to be free. With snow, you can dig it away and the wheel is free. But with liquid like mud, it is completely different. As soon as you remove a shovel full of mud, two shovels full take its place. From around the wheel, from under the truck or from three metres away in any direction.

I soon realized that the shovel will not be of much help. I got on my knees and became immediately immersed waist deep in mud. With my hand I began to scoop the mud from around the wheel and pushing it away in all directions. It took me a couple of hours to free each of the two rear wheels and put on the chains. By then I was soaked in mud from my neck down and it was coming off me in shovels full.

I got into the cab dripping mud and started the motor. Lo and behind, the truck began to move forwards. Being afraid to stop, I continued until I got a stretch of dry road. Then I took off the chains, got back into the cab which by then was as muddy as the road, turned on the heater as high as it would go and began to dry myself and the inside of the cab.

By nightfall I got to St. Lawrence where fortunately the little motel had rooms with a bath. As for my clothes, the dry mud was coming off in clumps.

The above mentioned event was one of many during the first twenty-five years of my travels over the Newfoundland roads. True, some were like the one above, to the extreme, some not quite like this but enough to make travelling a constant struggle for every mile of the road.

My prayer during all those years was to see those roads paved over, as to make my livelihood a bit easier. Little did I know that the paving of those roads would spell the end of a livelihood for many others, so called wholesalers like me who made a living by selling all sorts of goods to the small stores all over the island, in every settlement and at every road junctions.

The completion and paving of the Newfoundland roads made travelling across the island an enjoyment. A pleasure if to compare with the previous state and people found a new pastime and recreation, namely traveling.

Mainland chain stores soon started building shopping malls in the major centres where they opened large department stores. They could draw the population from as far as seventy or eighty kilometres away, thus depriving the local small storekeepers of a livelihood. Understandably, if the small stores could not sell, they stopped buying from their suppliers, people like me.

It turned out that if for some the paved roads were a blessing, for others it was a misfortune, if not a calamity. If those like me could be counted across the island by the dozen, selling dry good, footwear, hardware, medicine, small ware, novelties, kitchenware, baked stuff, sweets and what not, the small stores that were forced to close could be counted by the thousand.

But all this happened in the eighties. In the sixties, we were still struggling in the mud. Pavement then, was a thing to be desired, to be yearned for and to look forward to, in the distant future.

In the summer of 1966, our son Kenneth finished grade nine at Macpherson Junior High School and entered grade ten at Prince of Wales Collegiate. Finishing grade eleven in 1968 with distinctions like all previous school years. Our older daughter Sharon (Esther Sheva), meanwhile who entered St. Andrew's School in grade three in 1964, continued there until finishing grade six in 1968. Our younger daughter, Aviva, (Hanna Sarah) was enrolled in 1964 into St. Andrew's School in grade one, graduating grade six in 1970.

As the summer of 1969 was approaching, and our son Kenneth was finishing the eleventh grade, (that is the last year of high school in Newfoundland), we began to consider that he take a trip to Israel organized by the Canadian Jewish congress. Then, as now, the congress was sponsoring such trips for Jewish teens across Canada with the aim of acquainting them with our ancient homeland. It was to enhance their commitment to Judaism and on-going connection with Israel. Such trips held the promise of instilling in those young boys and girls the ingredient needed in becoming committed Jews and Zionists.

The group consisted of youths from all over Canada. The point of embarkation was Montreal and amongst them was our son Kenneth.

That summer both our daughters, Sharon and Aviva attended Camp Kadimah and continued going for the next few years.

When our son came back, he was impressed enough to want to continue his studies in Israel. However, he needed a year university in St. John's to compensate for the twelfth grade high school, which did not exist in Newfoundland.

Our son was accepted into the Memorial University of St. John's with the intention to enter the faculty of engineering. Meantime we got in touch with the Technion in Haifa and applied for his admittance. The reply came stating that our son would have to pass an exam, even with his first year university diploma and attend a four month "Ulpan". (Hebrew instruction course in Israel.)

We, that is Ruth and I waited impatiently for his first university year to pass so our son could go to Israel to continue with his studies. Not having experience in sending a child to Israel, we were just waiting for the day to come, knowing that he will be there among his own.

In early May, as soon as our son received his first year university marks, we sent it to Haifa Technion. The exchange of mail took three weeks, at which time we received a letter from a certain Mr. Shechter, the dean of the department for foreign students at the Technion acknowledging the receipt of our son's marks and saying that in view of his exceptional marks, which in fact were exceptional, he would not have to write entry exams, but would still have to attend the "ulpan." He also said that since the course had already started, Ken should come right away.

I got in touch with Mr. Shechter on the phone and I will quote the exact words he used to emphasize the urgency of Ken coming over. He said; "As brent". In Yiddish, literally means its on fire, imperative that he comes now.

A week or so later, our son was on his way to Israel. We had arranged with friends of ours by the name of Freda and Alter Britvitz residing in Netania, for our son to be put up there for a few days, until he would be ready to go to the "ulpan". We began to make plans for Ruth and I to go in July to Israel to see how he was coming along.

Flying over, as I recall, Ruth and I were wondering if our son would be waiting for us at the airport. We came to the conclusion that he will, providing he gets the day off from the "ulpan."

The airport terminal in 1970 was much smaller than the present day one in Lod. Now, Ben Gurion Airport and the luggage room was divided from the passenger waiting crowd by only a glass wall. While waiting for the luggage to arrive, Ruth glanced at the crowd behind the glass and immediately noticed our son. Look, she said to me, indicating with her head the direction

I should look. Sure enough, there towering by half a head above the crowd, stood our son.

When we finally got our luggage and pushed the heavily loaded cart outside, we got to embrace our son and found out that he is still waiting to be accepted into the ulpan due to the luck of a particular signature from a member of the Jewish agency in Haifa, who is so busy that he cannot be found in his office.

To be fair I can not put all the blame on that particular persons shoulders. To a lesser degree, I can blame others, including ourselves. Being in a hurry to send our son to Israel, we did not inquire nor were we told that certain formalities might be needed in Israel that can be arranged in or from Canada with much greater ease and speed than there. For example, in order to be accepted into the ulpan, which included living accommodations and board, one needed a doctor's health certificate, which we could have obtained from our family doctor in five minutes as he had the medical records of our childern from the day they were born. As there was no record of our son in Israel, they had to build one sending him from doctor to doctor and from lab to lab.

Due to the fact that those facilities were over loaded with work, he had to wait days for an appointment. In short, he wasted the whole month on those formalities and was now waiting for the earlier mentioned signature. I hate to say that Ruth and I spent another week in that office literally sitting and waiting before we got it on an early Friday afternoon.

On Sunday, erev Tisho Be'av (the eve of the ninth of the month of Av), we went to Narzeret Eilit where the ulpan was situated. To be honest, our mood was suitably depressed. It was the first time that we parted with our son, a seventeen year old boy, for what it was supposed to be a year. A distance of over five thousand miles and him not knowing anybody. We did not know his fellow students except for the fact that he was the youngest and the next youngest was six years older than he was. Also all the other students had already lived in Israel several months up to a year and that the majority are academics. Many were university professors from Eastern Europe and South America.

But what concerned us most was the fact that he missed the first two months of the four month course and he might find it difficult to catch up.

We were right. From our consequent telephone conversations with him, we deduced that things were not easy for him and should he decide to give it up, it would be fine with us.

In the end I suppose it was a combination of all the above that brought him back from Israel. After the ulpan was over, his place in M.U.N. university was waiting for him and he continued for the next four years until graduation.

The same summer of 1970 when Ken returned back to Memorial University of Newfoundland (M.U.N.), our younger daughter Aviva finished her sixth grade at St. Andrew's School and was enrolled in the seventh grade at Macpherson Junior High School.

A new system of instruction was adopted in the engineering faculty at M.U.N. by which the students attended four months of instructions and four months of practical application working on assigned jobs or finding their own study related work. It also meant that there were no more vacations for the engineering students for the next five years, except a few short ones in between semesters.

It also meant no more summer camp for our son and from then on, only our daughters attended summer camp near Halifax.

In 1971 our older daughter Sharon finished the ninth grade at Macpherson and entered grade ten at Prince of Wales collegiate graduating from grade eleven in 1973 with even higher marks than her brother. In the same year, our younger daughter Aviva graduated grade nine from Macpherson and enrolled in Prince of Wales collegiate for grade ten. Aviva graduated there from grade eleven in 1975.

Coming back to our older daughter Sharon, having graduated from grade eleven in 1973 at Prince of Wales collegiate, she enrolled in the first year at M.U.N. As with our son we began planning on sending her to Israel to continue her studies in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. However, this time having previous experience with our son, we knew better and arranged all formalities from Canada. So as when the school year came around in the summer of 1974, all our daughter had to do was attend the "ulpan", which was in conjunction with the university and under its auspice and to last for a full year.

I would be lying if I would say that Ruth and I were not worried by sending a seventeen year old daughter away so far. The only people we had there were Ruth's cousin, Pinchus Oiring and family, whom our daughter never met before and my second and third cousins, Gidon and Lau Lerman and Rabbi Seymour and wife Belle Zambrowsky. Also Chaim and Sonia Shemesh and Sheine Rachel.

We tried to make the best of that summer of 1974. As our son was constantly occupied either studying or working, Ruth, I, and the two girls

used to take advantage of the few hours I could spare to go for drives or on a picnic to "Butter Pot Park" near Holyrood, some thirty miles south west of St. John's. I found it even harder, I think, to say good bye to Sharon than to our son when we left him in Israel four years earlier. Maybe because one expects a boy to manage better and more independently than a girl.

The time for her to leave came in early summer of 1974. Anxiously, we awaited her call of her arrival and it came as a relief straight from Jerusalem and from the dormitory in which she had spent the entire following year. She returned a year later in early summer of 1975 to spend her vacation with the family. Being spared the hustle of her brother's experience four years earlier, she quickly adopted easily to the local life style and what is more important became fast familiar with the Hebrew language to an extent that after a couple of years in Israel, she was being taken for a native, Sabra.

That same spring our son graduated from M.U.N. with a bachelors degree in electrical engineering. The graduation in itself was quite an impressive affair to watch. Ruth's parents came from Montreal.

And so we lived to see our first child and only son graduating from university. A month or so later, our younger daughter Aviva finished grade eleven from Prince of Wales collegiate, thus receiving her high school matriculation and applied to university.

A couple of years before our son graduated from university, he started going out with a St. John's girl by the name of Lisa Nathanson. They, Ken and Lisa knew each other from childhood, as our son was only four years old when we moved to St. John's. The Jewish children attended Sunday Hebrew school as it was customary in small communities. They used to participate in plays, at times attended services and so on. The community was like one big family inviting everybody for special occasions, celebrations, anniversaries and so on. There were many occasions for not only the grown ups, but for the children too, to be together.

However, one should not get the idea that everything was just perfect, or smooth or without any frictions in the community. We had our share of quarrels, discords, and strives and with it came a good measure of gossip, rumour and even slander, which only ceased due to natural attrition and departure of the gossip mongers. The last few years before our departure, the Jewish community shrunk to a shadow of its former self, and the remaining few families, clung closely to each other.

In 1975 the community was in its prime when Ken and Lisa decided to get married. They set the date for August 24 and Ruth and I sat down to make up the list of guests from our side of the family. By then my uncles and aunts

in New York had gone, so the invitations went out to the cousins. I did not forget my benefactor, Leon Kulowski in Poland. He was retired five years earlier in 1970 at the age of sixty according to the then Polish law. My constant attempts to bring him on a visit to Israel were fruitless, so I was hoping that the Polish government will let him come for a visit to St. John's seeing that he was here so many times before. After the formal invitation, I paid a travel agency for his return ticket and waited to hear from him.

The waiting days turned into weeks and the weeks into months. I even sent a notary public's letter to the Polish government with a guarantee to look after all the expenses incurred by him. Still no action. All he needed was a foreign passport to leave the country and time was getting short.

I wanted him very much to be at our son's wedding, feeling that if somebody deserved to be there, it was him.

Some ten days before the wedding, we received a telegram that he got the passport.

Ruth and I went to Montreal to welcome him at the airport.

Montreal was sweltering in a heat wave. The highest temperature I can remember. Most likely the highest ever recorded in Montreal. I remember sitting with Ruth and Leon in the kitchen of Ruth's parents completely soaked in sweat.

We were glad to get back to St. John's with Leon Kulowski as our guest of honour. The moment we returned, we got busy with the wedding preparations and welcoming the guests from our side of the family. Among them were Ruth's parents, Penny and Dora Pleet, Ruth's brother and wife, Lenard and Sheila Pleet, Ruth's mother's best friend, Rose Rockstein and a cousin of the Pleet family, Pola Binder. From the states were my cousins; the children of my uncle Shloime; Abe (Abraham) and his wife Rebecca Auerbach, Rose and her brother Leo (Lipa) and his son Steven Auerbach, Harold and his wife Eva Auerbach and Eli and his wife Shirley Auerbach.

Of course for that summer vacation our older daughter Sharon came from Israel after finishing the year long "ulpan." (Hebrew course.)

The "Chupa" marriage ceremony took place on the "Shul Bema" (The platform in a synagogue from which the Torah is read). It was conducted by Rabbi Petersiel and the dinner and dancing took place in the modern Arts and Culture Centre.

Right after the wedding, the newlyweds left on their honey moon. A day or two later, the out of town guests were all gone. My friend and benefactor Leon Kulowski remained with us for close to six weeks. During that time he travelled with me all over the eastern part of Newfoundland and saw of it

more than many local born people. During his stay he was interviewed on television and his or rather our story was written up in the local newspapers. I succeeded in arranging for him a stop over in Paris for twenty four hours on his way back so that he could see his cousin living there and a tour of the city to see its highlights.

After the excitement of our son's wedding and the departure of Leon, came the days of awe which in turn were followed by the holiday of "Sukkoth" (Tabernacle) that lasts eight days. There was still one difficult hurdle for us to get over. Namely the departure of our daughter Sharon to Israel where she enrolled in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the overseas student program. Just as it was difficult for us to part with her the previous year, so it was this time too, as not only she, but our son Ken now married moved out. With us remained our youngest, Aviva who having finished grade eleven, enrolled in M.U.N. in St. John's.

Our son got a job with Newfoundland Light and Power whose office was two minutes drive from our house or a ten minute walk. Even though he used to pass by fifty meters from our house going and coming from work, we did not see him as often as we would have liked to.

And so did the winter 1975-76 pass. During that time we were getting our younger daughter Aviva ready to go to study in Israel. By spring of 1976 all the formalities were ready. With the end of the university year, Sharon came home for the summer vacation and two months later both our girls left for Israel. Sharon to enter first year university and Aviva into the university "ulpan."

Now life became lonelier for us, especially for Ruth having to be home by herself 3-4 days a week. Even the activities in the community had lessened. Having paid up the mortgage on the new synagogue, there was no incentive for money raising functions and the bingo games, bake sales and dances ceased. True some were still taking place in order to raise money for "Hadassah" or other charitable organizations, but not to the extent of the previous years.

And so did the long Newfoundland winter pass. In early summer both our girls came home for the vacation. That same year our son Ken with his wife decided to move to Toronto. After the vacations, our daughters returned to Jerusalem to continue their studies. Again in early summer of 1978 they came home on vacation but in the fall of that year only Sharon returned to Jerusalem. Aviva decided to quit the University of Jerusalem and move to Toronto to work. There for a couple of years she shared an apartment with a Jewish girl from South Africa and worked with computers for a company by

the name of "Sinnott Data Processing". When the company was bought out by Moore Business Forms, and the company then moved to Mississauga, it became difficult for Aviva to commute the long distance. She gave up her job after eight years and started working for the L.C.B.O. (The Liquor Control Board of Ontario.)

Our son Ken got a job with Digital Equipment Co. where he remained a software specialist for thirteen years. He later went on his own to work for the Toronto Sun Newspaper where he is working now.

Sharon continued in the Hebrew University graduating as a pharmacist in 1980. While in Jerusalem she met a young Jerusalemite by the name of Meir Gazit. They were married on February 17,1980 in The Central Hotel in Jerusalem.

From our side of the family from across the ocean came: Bobba Dora Pleet, her life long friend Rose Rockstein from Florida and Jenny Smilestein from Montreal. Our son Ken and his wife as well as our daughter Aviva came from Toronto where they lived.

Present were some of our relatives in Israel; My father's cousin Yaakov Kopel Nisselbaum, his wife Henia and son Moshe. The wife of my father's cousin Sonia Shemesh and her daughter Lau with her husband, Gideon Lerman and their two daughters, Irit and Orna. Sonia's younger daughter Niva with her husband Israel. Ruth's cousin Pinchus Moshe and wife. Also my closest friend from the Auschwitz days Leibel and his wife Bat Sheva Bliskowsky and their daughter Jehudit and husband Azi.

From Newfoundland came our friends Phishel and Tova Auerbach and a dozen or so other members of our Jewish community.

The wedding was officiated by Rabbi Seymour Zambrowski, a relative of ours living in Jerusalem.

After the wedding Ruth and I made sure Sharon and Meir had a furnished condo in a new part of Jerusalem to move into. At that time Meir was working in the credit department of a large bank in Jerusalem. Sharon got a good job in the pharmacy of the new Shaarei Tzedek Hospital. She held that position until the birth of her first child, a girl, on March 13, 1984, (9th in Adar "B") whom they named Orly Penny after my father-in-law Pinchas Pleet. As Ruth and her mother were already in Israel since January, I came to welcome the new addition to the family. Here again I went through all the emotions I went through when our son Ken was born. Not letting on, I hid all my feelings deep inside me, speaking without moving my lips, to my parents, grandparents, pointing out to them that their memory and legacy will live on in generations to come. I saw in my grandchild the continuity of all

my family that had been so mercilessly murdered. I saw in her the permanence of my family and our people.

As it was close to Passover, we stayed in Israel over the holidays. In the fall of that same year, Sharon, her husband Meir and baby came to St. John's to spend the High Holidays with us and "Sukkoth" (Tabernacles). The following spring in 1985, Sharon, Meir and Orly moved to Toronto.

Meir began working in the jewellery business and Sharon having passed the Canadian Pharmacy exams and licensing exams, worked for a year as an intern as required by law. Having finished the internship, she started working for Shoppers Drug Mart where she is still working today.

Having now our three children in Toronto and our first grandchild, our visits to Toronto became more frequent. I watched with pride and joy as our first grandchild was turning slowly from a baby into a little girl and wishing to be able to spend time with her.

For us in Newfoundland things began to change. The Jewish community began to shrink. The old members continued to pass on. A few retired to Florida. The young people, unable to find work in Newfoundland, moved to larger cities on the mainland. My kind of business began to disintegrate. As more paved roads were being built on the island, communication between settlements became easier and malls were being built in major centres. The local population was suddenly exposed to a variety of merchandize they had never seen before. Abandoning their old sources of supply they began to make their purchasing at the malls, thus depriving the petty retailers of their livelihood.

Many retailers were forced to close their business and lose their source of income inadvertently making me lose a great part of my income too.

As my business ceased to be profitable and having our children in Toronto, we began to think of moving closer to them.

On May 5, 1989 our daughter Sharon gave birth to her second child, a boy. Ruth and I came to the "Brith-Millah" (circumcision ceremony) where the new born baby was named "Eitan Lavi Aryeh". Eitan was the parents choice. "Lavi" after Meir's father and "Aryeh" after my brother "Laibl" (Lova) who perished in Auschwitz at the age of thirteen. By sheer coincidence Eitan Levi Aryeh was born on the 44th anniversary of my liberation from Gusen 1 concentration camp. Again all the thoughts and all the emotions I felt with the birth of our first grandchild returned to me with just as much intensity, with just as much earnestness. This feeling came over me with the birth of the other grandchildren too.

The birth of our second grandchild gave us even more incentive to be with the children and at the end of August 1989, we moved to Toronto. Unable to buy a house for the money we got for our home in St. John's, we had to settle for a rented apartment in which we are still living ten years later.

No later than a month after we moved to Toronto, I received an invitation from Mr. Ernest Condon of Labrador to come to Labrador to address schools, churches and legions on the topic of the Holocaust in conjunction with the approaching of the 11th of November.

Even though I knew the eastern part of Newfoundland like the palm of my hand, I had never been so far north as Labrador and was curious to see it.

Here I have to back track three or four decades. Sometime in the sixties I was approached by the dean of religious studies at Memorial University of St. John's, namely Dr. Morley Hodder, to address one of his classes on the topic of the Holocaust. Half heartedly I accepted. Apparently the class liked what I had to say for I was invited back repeatedly. Before long I was beginning to be invited to schools in St. John's. It was more difficult with the out of town schools where some were over a hundred miles away and it entailed a loss of a day's work for me. Many times it interfered with my weekly business trips out of town. Still I did not want to deprive the students the chance of acquainting themselves with the events, atrocities and immensity of its crime. I like to point out that I never accepted any gratuity not even a token. In fact if I would add up the time lost and loss of business plus the many miles spent traveling, the gas and vehicle depreciation, it would come to a nice sum to my detriment.

Apparently they heard of me in the far north of Newfoundland and invited me. Ruth travelled with me and we spent four busy days there. On the 11th of November, there was a march in front of the cenotaph. I was invited to participate. Marching between the chief of the local mounted police detachment and the chief of the local police who both towered over me, we marched in the front row. When it came to the wreath laying, it was announced on the loud speaker the name of the person and in whose behalf that wreath is being laid. There were wreaths laid on behalf and in memory of the fallen in the army, air forces, navy and so on. Suddenly two soldiers appear besides me carrying a wreath. On its wide ribbon, I see written in golden letters; "In memory of the six million Jews that perished in the Holocaust." I was moved to tears when I heard the loud speaker announce that Moishe Kantorowitz will lay a wreath in memory of the six million Jews that were slaughtered in the Holocaust. With trembling legs I hepled carry the wreath between the two soldiers and laid it at the cement wall of the

cenotaph. Even now, ten years later, when I think of that event I get emotional and feel a deep gratitude to those Labrador people in general and Mr. Ernest Condon in particular who was instrumental in bringing us to Labrador City and making us feel welcome there. For showing his, his families and even the communities respect and difference to the victims of the Holocaust.

During those four days I must have delivered over a dozen speeches to schools and churches, not to mention radio interviews. We were also taken on a private tour of the iron ore mine, the largest in Canada. We were impressed with the mine, the city of Labrador. It is the most northern city in Canada and above all, they had the most friendly and warm hearted people. It truly was an experience that Ruth and I will never forget.

Shortly after our return from Labrador, I received a letter from Dr. Sam Revusky, a university professor at Memorial University in St. John's. In it he was asking me to help him translate one of his father's books that he wrote shortly after the end of the First World War. The book that his father, Abraham Revusky wrote, among others under the title "In Di Shvere Teg Oyf Ukraine;

Zikhroynes Fun A Yiddishn Minister."

It deals with the short period of Ukrainian independence in the years 1917-1919 and the slaughter of thousands of Jews in Ukraine during that era. Abraham Revusky's observation from the vantage point of a Jewish minister in Chekhivsky's short lived socialistic cabinet.

I gladly agreed, hoping to gain some experience for my own future writing of my story which I started some ten years earlier and after having written a dozen pages in Yiddish, I put it aside.

It took us two years to have it translated but it needed a lot of smoothing out for which my knowledge of English was insufficient. It was left to Sam Revusky to do it by himself.

It was only after I finished my part in helping Dr. Sam Revusky translate the Yiddish that I sat down in earnest to write my story. As I had the first dozen pages written in Yiddish, I continued doing so. The real reason, however, that I continued writing in Yiddish was that despite my over fifty years in Canada, I still have a better command of Yiddish than English. The writing progressed slowly with many interruptions for various reasons. Many interruptions were short ones and others lasting a month or more. Even though my writing is based on my memory, I had to confirm certain dates or equate them to the world or Jewish calendar.

In 1993 I turned seventy. Ruth wanted to make it a memorable year. During our thirty three years in Newfoundland, I made many trips to Montreal on business and accumulated many air points. Now after retirement, it was a good time to use them up. Ruth found out that I have enough points to take us both to Hong Kong, Singapore, Bang Kok, and back. Here was a chance to see an exotic part of the world we would not otherwise see. While in Hong Kong, we made a detour into China visiting Shanghai, Bejing, Xian, and Gulin. We came back two weeks before Pessach (Passover) and were picked up by Sharon and Meir. On the way home, Sharon tells us that she is pregnant. On October 21, 1992 (25th of Tishrey), Sharon gave birth to a boy. At his "Brith-Millah" (circumcision ceremony), he was named Erez Shlomo Lev. Shlomo after my sister Sarah, (Sonia) and Lev after my youngest sister Liba. Both of them perished in Auschwitz with all my family on February 1,1943. Now I had names after all the members of my immediate family. I felt that at least their names will not be erased, at the same time feeling sad for my extended family of which not a soul was left to carry on their names and memory.

Our second daughter, Aviva got married in the fall of 1990. The wedding took place in Toronto at the Beth David Shull and was officiated by Rabbi Shein. This time many more relatives of Ruth and mine attended. Besides Ruth's mother, Dora Pleet, Ruth's brother, Lenny Pleet, his wife Sheila and their two children, Janina and Joseph all from Montreal. Ruth's cousins from Ottawa and Detroit also attended.

From my side was Abraham Auerbach, his wife Rebecca, his daughter, Pola and husband Herman, their daughter Heather and sons Adam and Robert. Also, my cousins Rose and Eli Auerbach all from New York. My cousins Harold and his wife Eva Auerbach from Silver Spring, Maryland and my cousin Jack Auerbach from Long Beach.

On August 27, 1995 (second day Rosh Chodesh) our daughter Aviva gave birth to a girl. She was named in the Lodzer Shul (synagogue) after my father's two sisters who perished in the Holocaust. Their names were Sheindl and Pesl. Here again I had the privilege to fulfill their and my wish by perpetuating the names of my two aunts whose families were completely obliterated. My daughter calls her Ariella.

In April of the year 1995 I received a letter from Memorial University of Newfoundland saying and I quote: "1995 marks the 50th anniversary of end of World War II and the closure of one of the saddest chapters in human history. In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Holocaust, in celebration of the triumph of life over the forces of darkness and evil and in

contemplation of your personal involvement in those events as well as the years you spent as a citizen of this province teaching the consequences of racial and religious hatred, Memorial University of Newfoundland wishes to award to you an honorary degree. On behalf of the senate of Memorial University, I therefore have the honour to invite you to be present at our annual fall convocation on October 28, 1995 to accept the degree of Doctor of Law, Honoris Causa. The university community would also be delighted if you would agree to address convocation."

I found out shortly after that it was thanks to our good friend and humanitarian, Ernest Condon who submitted my candidacy for this honour to the senate of the university, which was unanimously accepted.

Ruth and I arrived in St. John's Thursday evening, October 26,1995 accompanied by our daughter Sharon and her two older children, Orly and Eitan. The third child, the youngest Erez, stayed home with his father due to his young age. Our second daughter, Aviva could not come as she would find it too difficult to travel with a month old baby. The next day I spent some time trying on graduation gowns at the university and seeing the city with Ruth. For the Friday evening Sabbath meal, we were invited to our friend, Judy Wilansky, where we enjoyed the evening with some prominent members of the community including Ernest Condon and his charming mother. For Saturday lunch, we were invited to the lieutenant governor of Newfoundland. Sharing the meal with the premier and some ministers of Newfoundland as well as some university dignitaries.

After the meal, we were all driven to the university where in its huge hall the convocation took place. It all proceeded with great fanfare. After several hundred students received their degrees, the university public speaker introduced me to the thousands of guests, graduating students, their families and faculty. The contents of his speech and delivery was admirable and impassionate. After being bestowed with the university cape and handed the degree by the chancellor of the university, John Crosby, I took the podium with a good measure of trepidation. I spoke in my life to small and large groups, but never to so large and prestigious an audience. I was told later the contents and delivery was good. I hope that it was.

That same evening the university threw a dinner for the members of the provincial government, faculty, distinguished members of the city administration and us.

The next day the Jewish community held a luncheon for us. Right after, Sharon and the two children left for Toronto. I spend the rest of the day and

part of the following day, Monday speaking to schools. We returned home Monday evening.

Coming back home I returned to my favourite pursuit, that is the writing of my life story and when called upon by the Holocaust education and memorial centre, I continued to address students and teach them the results of hatred, bigotry and racial discrimination. Before I knew it, another few years rolled by and on Friday, November 14, 1997, (15th of Cheshvan 5757) our younger daughter, Aviva gave birth to a girl. She too was named in the Lodzer Shull and given the name Freida-Khinka. Freida, after my mother's mother Freida-Leah who died in Shershev in 1935, and Khinka, after my father's mother who perished in Auschwitz together with my entire family on February 1, 1943. My daughter Aviva calls her Genevieve but to Ruth and I, she is called Freidala. Here again, I had the privilege to perpetuate the names and memories of my two grandmothers.

Now as I am concluding the last few lines of my story I am going back to my youth, to my adolescent years and wonder if I could have changed something in my life or in the life of my dear ones. I still remember as a boy, the stories my father used to tell me about his escapades as a soldier during World War I. In my exuberant imagination I used to see myself a hero in such circumstances. How could have I, my father or anybody else for this matter, imagine the terror, the horror, the cruelties and atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and their sympathizers during their long night of unimaginable savagery.

Who could have imagined that in the dark corners of their minds (not souls for to commit such atrocities there could be soul), there was the madness and ability to conceive and execute a plan to annihilate an entire people, an entire race, an entire faith. This was done in the most inconceivable, in the most barbaric way.

My mind takes me back to the open ditches and entire families lined up along its edge being moved down by machine guns. Little babies being thrown alive down into open pits. The gapping openings of the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The tortured deaths of the hundreds of thousands of camp inmates and ask myself what could I have done to change it, or to change anything at all? What could I have done for my family? I live with so much regret. I am tortured by remorse for not doing something. Yet I know that there was nothing I could do. The ten thousand souls of the ghetto I was in all tried to come up with something. All in vain. Every soul tried to save

itself, to save a loved one. There were smarter people than I, braver than I. But to no avail. We all ended up in Auschwitz. The handful that succeeded to get out of the ghetto or ghettos, to fight the Nazis, were decimated in battle or by anti-Semitic partisan groups. Few of them remained to tell their stories and bemoan their losses.

I look back with so much hurt to the year and a half that we, that is my immediate family spent together under the tyrannical rule of the accursed Nazis and my heart aches with pain. I can still see the tears rolling down my mother's cheeks, my parent's desperate search for a way out, which they knew will not be found. The innocent and frightened faces of my little sisters and brother looking up to my parents who where looking back at them with so much pain, sadness and helplessness. They knew that there is nothing in the world that will reverse their ultimate fate.

I ask myself how could a civilized people sink to such depth to which the most primitive creature on each did not descent so far?

I think about the millions that died and they died the most horrific deaths. What about their lives that have been snuffed out prematurely. Some were only hours old, some were not able to crawl or walk or speak yet. Those children from kindergarten, pre-schools and schools. A million and a half children. How much creative power, undiscovered and discovered talent. They were never given a chance.

What about the grown ups? The amount of brain power, talent, creativity? It is staggering, incalculable. Six million human beings among them world renown personalities in every conceivable field and the ordinary people? Did they not think? Did they not feel? Were they not human beings like us? They knew of joy and of grief. Of happiness and sadness. Of satiety and hunger. Of health and sickness. Of bliss and sorrow. Of bounty and scarcity. What about their personal lives? Their dreams. Their hopes. Their plans for the future that were left unfullfilled. Who will finish their dreams? Their hopes? Their plans? Who will sing their unsung songs? Their unwritten music, poetry and prose? Who will do all this? Who will rebuild a world that took almost two millennium to build a culture with its own spirituality. A spirituality so profoundly damaged that the immensity of it cannot be comprehended.

I lift my eyes to the HEAVEN heights and join the millions of my slaughtered brethren in a heaven splitting cry, why? WHY??

AS WELL AS THE FIFTY-ONE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY

***** THE END ******

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